ALIENS

MARY
TAPPAN
WRIGHT

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ALIENS

BY

MARY TAPPAN WRIGHT

AUTHOR OF "A TRUCE AND OTHER STORIES"

CHARLES SCRIBNER'S SONS

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ALIENS

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I

"WHAT WORLDS AWAY!"

THE train was waiting on a side-track, and had been waiting indefinitely—no one knew why, and no one apparently had sufficient curiosity to find out. It was a November day, and yet the doors of the passenger-car were set wide open to the hot, damp breeze, while the people at the windows were fanning themselves with their papers and books.

Far across the plantation behind a heavy belt of water-oaks the sun was setting—a dull streak of crimson beneath a dappled sky of gray; down a long red road, treading up billows of pinkish dust, a couple of bullocks jogged lazily, drawing a rude cart, and standing on the single plank which formed the wagon-bed were two or three silent negroes. Cotton hung in tufts from their clothing; cotton drifted, like dirty snow, back and forth on the narrow platform in front of the log-cabin which did duty as a station, and at the sides of the road cotton, left hanging on the stalk by careless pickers, wagged its ragged bolls drearily at every puff of sultry air.

Cotton futures, young ladies, and a mysterious political outlook—spoken of in whispers—formed the chief

topic of conversation among a small party of men who, having gone outside to smoke, were waiting on a pile of boards near the track; inside the car, the women had drawn together, apparently to hold an informal clinic, solemnly examining each other's tongues and shaking their heads over adverse symptoms.

Helen Thurston sat alone, listening—half amused, half disdainful. She had been reading, but now she allowed her magazine to rest in her lap, while she watched the slow steps of her husband who was walking up and down the platform. Each time, however, as he turned in her direction, she dropped her eyes to her book again. She did not wish to talk; thus she excused herself—it was all too interesting to miss. "Yes, all of it!" she protested, defying her own fears. And indeed her feelings at the beginning of this long journey had partaken solely of the vivid interest of the explorer, but gradually, as she had proceeded farther and farther South, a faint personal sensation of dismay had begun to thrill beneath this first excitement; her brain was becoming dazed with new impressions—strange impressions; at times it required an effort of the will to prevent their being terrible ones.

At every station, in crowds, sad, bad, introspective black faces, and solemn, arrogant, dyspeptic white ones had gathered before the car-windows, gazing in with stolid curiosity. Dashing riders, booted and spurred, curvetted in pictorial self-consciousness at the crossings. In the towns, the houses, in their unkempt gardens, stood with closed shutters behind broken fences, while the women, dainty and pretty, passed slowly along the streets, talking together with gentle

elegance—a population, it seemed, of idlers in a land of despair. And now, as she neared her destination, fatigue and excitement combined to make this great belt of cotton and color seem accursed, under a ban, unspeakably desolate in its lazy, hopeless unthrift; and the vast, melancholy plantations; the tragic tangles of cane and creeper; the blighted trees floating with ghostly moss; the scattered, squalid cabins; the blood-red gashes in the earth; the startling green of the pines, and the heavy foliage of the mournful horizon—all inspired her with something little short of horror. "But it is interesting," she assured herself again and again; "very interesting."

"Should you like to come out and walk?"

She started; her husband was standing under the window looking up at her. "I am too tired," she said, after a moment's hesitation.

He did not urge it, but, lighting a cigar, began his slow pacing up and down again. She noted that, as he passed, the men on the board-pile did not hail him as they had their fellows, and that their talk subdued itself to silence until he had moved away. He had told her that the half of Tallawara were on the train that day; without giving the matter much thought, she decided in favor of the half that had remained at home.

"I declare, if they ain't the queerest bride and groom I ever laid my eyes on!" she heard one nasal voice upraised. "I was on the train when they came aboard. She piled all her things in one seat, and he piled his in another, and there they sat, reading—*reading!* When I go on my wedding trip with——"

"Miss Zoë Mason," interpolated a second voice.

There was a laugh, but the first speaker did not seem abashed.

"Well, I'm not the only person in this assembly who thinks he might enjoy going on a wedding trip with Miss Zoë," he drawled. "And when we do go——"

"Seems to me you're mighty good and sure of it," growled a third, at which the laughter swelled to a shout.

"They were talking right smart when I saw them," said the second speaker. "Seemed to be enjoying theirselves—most as much as you and Miss Zoë did the night of the Baptist supper, Brinton!" There was another burst of laughter.

"Oh, I heard them!" answered Miss Zoë's aspirant bridegroom, disparagingly. "And I'm not going to have any such confounded deep conversation on my wedding trip, neither; it's a heap more of a compliment to have Miss Zoë's back turned on you."

"All the same, Brinton," said the other, "I like to hear Mrs. Thurston talk; she snips off her words so mighty pretty and plain."

"Shut up! she'll hear. Can't you see she's looking out the window!" said Brinton, lowering his voice. "You fellows haven't got any manners."

Mrs. Thurston turned her eyes toward the smoky line of great trees that shadowed the horizon. The sun was gone, and the darkness had gathered suddenly; a whistle sounded unexpectedly close at hand; all the loungers rose as an express train drew up at the platform, waiting a bare second, while the conductor and brakeman, with impressive rivalry, helped a young lady descend from the step.

"There don't seem to be anyone to get off but Miss Zoë Mason," drawled Brinton's gentle voice. "Who did you fellows come down here to meet?" There was no answering laugh; the young men were too intent upon helping the girl on the platform to carry her dozens of bundles on board the waiting train. She seemed to be a belle among them, for they trooped after her, as one man, and stood about her seat talking.

"What under the sun did you all come down for?" she inquired, innocently.

"To meet the bride, of course," answered Brinton. "What did you think we came for?"

"Whereabouts is she? Not on this car!"

"She's just opposite, watching her beloved promenading on the platform," whispered the man next her.

"That's the way you'll be doing, some day, for Jim, Miss Zoë," said Brinton.

"Mr. Brinton, you just please to keep your tongue still; you are getting too impertinent to live!" said Miss Zoë.

Mrs. Thurston turned again toward the window. Her husband stepped forward with an expression of relief. "What are you laughing at?" he asked.

She gave her head a slight nod backward, in dumb show.

"Yes?" answered Thurston, carelessly. "That young girl is Miss Mason. Her father is one of the leading lawyers."

"Are they going to keep us here all night?" inquired Miss Mason, impatiently. "What are we waiting for now?"

"Maybe some other young lady has telegraphed

ahead to have us wait for her on the seven o'clock express to-morrow morning," suggested Brinton.

"Oh, I reckon we're waiting for the Professor to finish his smoke," said another. "The Professor's a great man 'round this way." There was a little laugh among the group, not wholly good-natured; at that moment Thurston threw away his cigar; the train started, and he swung himself on board. "Didn't I tell you so!" said the last speaker, triumphantly.

The lamps were dim; reading was impossible, and Helen rested her chin on her hand and looked out at the sparks flashing by in the blackness. Thurston leaned over the back of the seat, and began to tell her the names of the people. "Brinton is the editor of the paper," he said. "That young fellow in the seat with Zoë Mason is Carpenter, professor of mathematics."

"Impossible!" she murmured.

"He is not such a bad fellow, and really an extraordinary mathematician."

"Who is the woman in front of Miss Mason? The one chewing gum?"

"That is Mrs. Yarnell. Her husband is the professor of Latin. Our landlady is her sister."

"Do you know any of them?"

"Of course; I know them all."

She turned to the window again. Very likely he knew these people in some way of business. As for the wife of the Latin professor and the occupant of the chair of mathematics, Helen had passed too many of the years of her life in a college town to be ignorant of certain inequalities between the social and the intellectual which lie at the root of many a sordid tragedy.

Thurston's voice broke in on her reflection. "We might as well be putting our things together; we are nearly there."

Everyone in the car ceased talking, in order to watch them as they began collecting the numerous bags and wraps, which seemed to have doubled with each day of their progress southward from the ice and snow of the New England village which they had left three days before. With a long, jolting rattle the train came to a standstill. The other passengers drew back, and they passed out first.

"Now, I thought a bride was bound to wear something kind of lively," complained Brinton, possessing himself of the major part of Miss Mason's parcels. "I declare you appear more like a bride yourself, Miss Zoë—you certainly do." He looked her over with a glance, half quizzical, half admiring, which Miss Zoë promptly resented.

"I just tell you, Mr. Brinton, I won't stand it!"

"How did you know I was thinking of Jim?" he inquired, tormentingly.

"I wouldn't stand it, either, Zoë," said Mrs. Yarnell, coming out of her seat as they passed. "He'll make all the other young men believe that you're sure enough engaged to Jim Trenholm, and they won't pay you a bit of attention. I know just what he's up to: he wants to run 'em all off, and have a clear field to himself."

Thurston and his wife, in the meanwhile, had hastened forward. It was quite dark outside; but, as they crossed the platform, there was a rush and scurry towards them, and ten or a dozen black figures threw them-

selves upon the bags they were carrying. In the light of the lanterns, held low, nothing could be seen clearly but a confusion of bare brown legs.

"Professah, lemme take yo' bag." "No, Professah, you gwine lem*me* have it!" "Professah, I'se you' own boy; y'ain't gwine 'low jes' any common nigger ca'y yo' bag *this evenin'*, ah you?" "You get out, you black image, you! Mis' Thurston, gimme yo' bag. I'se gwine teh ca'y you home. Get out, you no 'count trash! Ain't nobody gwine ca'y de bride up but me!"

Helen pressed closer to her husband, frightened at the tumult; but Thurston peremptorily scattered the claimants, and, calling a carriage, put his wife in, while he went to secure the luggage. In front, Helen could see nothing but the shirt-sleeves of the negro who sat by the driver on the box. The crowd of little ragamuffins were scrambling over the next comers, their heads in the shadow, and the tatters flapping about their yellow legs. Brinton's voice, good-natured but exasperated, called, "Get out of this! When I want you, I'll tell you." Then Thurston came back, and they rolled away over the soundless clay into the warm, dark night.

There were no stars in the sky, and hardly any lights in the streets. At either hand dim masses of foliage lined the way, and far back, under the trees, through some open door-way, a lamp would shine out on the tall white pillars of a porch. Helen's sense of fright now deepened to a recognized reality; and, in this scented, heavy night, even the darkness was a different darkness.

Thurston bent toward her. "Welcome home!" he said, in a low voice.

She turned upon him, startled and uncomprehending, trying to force a smile. She wished that he had had the tact to perceive that, as yet, it was not home. How could it be in this strange country, this horrible country?

He moved uneasily. She became aware that a long interval had gone by since he had spoken.

"Is it far from the station?" she asked. "How close the air is—and perfumed! I do not recognize the odor."

"Dat Cherokee rose, Mis'," said the negro on the box, without turning his head. "Sometimes dey blooms dat-a-way long afteh de season—jes' one, all alone—it's de mos' melancholies' smell I knows."

"Thank you," she said; and the boy nudged his neighbor with a violent plunge of his white elbow. She put out her hand to draw Thurston's attention, but he was leaning far back in his own corner of the carriage.

He had been looking forward to this home-coming, and during their long journey had been in misery lest it should rain. Now everything was as he would have it—everything but— "I wish it were daylight," he said quite slowly and distinctly. "Some of the old places we are passing are very stately; not stately as you understand it, of course; to Northern eyes we are all more or less dilapidated down here; but, at the same time, there is an element of the picturesque in it all, which greater neatness and more careful gardening would do away with."

His voice had a formal tone. Helen smiled under cover of the darkness, and wished, wearily, that he wouldn't address her as if she were a class.

Thurston waited a moment for some rejoinder; none coming, he turned away, looking out of the window on his own side of the carriage. Up to the final stages of the journey he had been full of the ideal. He was bringing home his bride! It was a triumph. His heart sang pæans and epithalamiums, and his thoughts bubbled over in vaguely ecstatic allusions—mainly literary. But during the whole of that last day he had been trying in vain to combat the leaden sense of discouragement that had seemed to be slowly creeping over Helen's usually cheerful spirit; there was something in the silent, weary apathy she had shown toward all her surroundings that oppressed and irritated him. This was not the joyous anticipation he had expected; such evident dejection betrayed a lack of faith in his better judgment that was painful.

Thurston was about eleven years older than his wife, and when he was graduated from the university where her father was a professor, great things were promised of him. He had accepted a position in a small Southern college merely as a temporary shift—a means of making a livelihood until the better opening, for which he was so well prepared, should present itself; but old Professor Prescott had shaken his head at the time, and prophesied that Thurston's career was ended.

"If he once gets down there, he will never come up," the old man had said. "What Thurston needs is something to call him out of himself—the good moral shock of seeing other men surpass him. Nothing will

outshine him where he is going: it will end in his being hypnotized by his own brilliancy."

And, in part at least, Thurston seemed to fulfil the prediction. He had never "come up." A small legacy had been left him in the third year of his stay at the South, and perhaps it was the spur of poverty that was lacking. He travelled, he saw many men, his friends were as the sands of the sea for number and as the rocks for unchanging constancy, and yet, somehow, whenever the doors on those upper realms opened, his friends went in, and Thurston remained behind—either he drew back to let one pass whose need was greater, or he lingered to finish some binding duty toward another; more often, he was not even there! And the doors, as years went by, opened at everlengthening intervals. All Thurston's actions were governed by a curiously deep-rooted reticence, and no one knew whether or not he was conscious that others had passed him on the way. His best friend, the old president of the college, had had great difficulty in persuading him to allow it to be known, even, that he intended to be married; still, when the engagement was announced, this had not prevented Tallawara from expressing its interest, and Thurston had explained that his future wife was the daughter of an old friend of his who had died the winter before.

"Was she young?" "Yes, nearly twenty-six"—forgetting that, in Tallawara chronology, twenty-six was almost middle-aged.

"What did she look like?" Thurston thought they might call her fair; he was not sure. Her eyes were very dark—sometimes; she had brown hair—not light

brown; well, yes, it might be called light brown; it was not black.

"Was she fond of art, or of music?"

A momentary smile gleamed on Thurston's face. She was fond of music, he said, and could play the violin very well indeed, he believed; though he could not say for himself; he had not heard her since she was a child.

"Hadn't heard her! Wouldn't she play for him?"

Thurston looked embarrassed. "The fact was," he stammered, "he feared he had not asked her. They generally—" He stopped.

"Had something more interesting on hand than a fiddle, hadn't you?" suggested Brinton, for the conversation had taken place at the house where they both boarded. Thurston looked grateful, and rose from the table.

"What church does she belong to, Professor?" called one of his tormentors.

"Oh, stop bothering him!" cried Brinton. "Can't you-all see that she's too good to be talked about?"

"Here we are," said Thurston, in a low voice, and Helen allowed him to help her out of the carriage without a word. They were late, the dining-room was empty; the "boy" waited on them in his shirt-sleeves, and fanned himself languidly with a dinner-plate. Helen had not even energy to be amused; she carried away from the table an impression of heat, and flies, and strange viands displeasing to her Northern palate.

She scarcely saw the room to which she was shown a few minutes later; and undressing mechanically, she

threw herself upon the bed, and fell into a dull slumber; but when the tired body had somewhat rested, the goading mind resumed its sway. Late in the night she found herself sitting up, oppressed by a sense of terror and isolation. Slipping noiselessly to the floor, she went to the window and looked out. A full moon was shining on some log-cabins not far from the house; billows of white mist were rising in a neighboring field, and a cow near by was lowing with soft, painful continuousness. She could hear laughter on the street—guttural, provocative; from the inky shadow near the cabins came a sound of scuffling, suppressed giggling, and expostulation. Helen recoiled with sick disgust as the little gate at the side of the house clicked softly, lifted by some cautious hand. A dog awoke, and bayed the moon until all his kind for miles around were aroused. The sound rolled in from every quarter, then died like a spent wave; and, in the lull, from almost under her window, came the sudden exasperating crow of a cock. Far off another answered it; then another, farther still, and again, fainter and more distant, a fourth.

The night was alive.

Was it only the cocks, or was the whole country signalling? Clear, thin, human, like the password of some eldrich confederation, she could hear it repeated over the vast, lonely areas she had traversed that day. The moon rolled pitilessly in the wide, empty sky, and unknown terrors lurked in the shadows of that strange misty land, with its wild, red soil, its unfamiliar vegetation, and its black, stealthy, nocturnal population.

She was afraid.

She returned to bed, but could not rest. Barred by the turned slats of the shutters, the windows showed beneath the white, thin curtain's ghastly squares; she put her fingers over her eyes to shut them out. "I cannot endure it!" she murmured. "I cannot endure it!"

II

THE FIRST MORNING

THE hysterical gobbling of some imprisoned turkey startled Helen out of a heavy slumber. She sat upright, throwing out her hands in nervous fright. The room was full of light; morning had come with a leap. Outside was a babel of farm-yard noises and negro chatter. She stared about her drearily, then laughed; the picturesque tragedy of the night had suddenly been transmuted to bare reality.

The high walls of the enormous room, papered in a flowery pattern of green and white figures, were cracked in long, meandering streaks from floor to ceiling, and plentifully ornamented with match-marks in the neighborhood of the deep indentations in the plaster, that registered the favored spots where other occupants had been in the habit of leaning back on the hind legs of their chairs when they smoked.

The great carved mahogany bed towered like a catafalque six or eight feet above her, and the sky-blue tester — rent here and there in jagged holes — was painted in wreaths of delicate pink roses. Helen looked up at the charming faded colors, grateful for their dainty frivolity. A broad mahogany wardrobe, as large as a small house, crossed one corner of the room, and in the corresponding corner, on the other side of the fire-place, was a heavy old bureau of the same

material. From somewhere came a sound of vigorous rubbing and splashing.

"Where are you?" she called.

"I am here," said Thurston, putting his head from behind the wardrobe. "This is my dressing-room; yours is over there."

She climbed out of bed carefully—it was too high to venture a jump—and crossed to a door at the side toward which Thurston had pointed. It was a little room, scarcely more than a closet, where the negro nurse or maid had slept in the days of slavery. Helen viewed its arrangements cheerfully, and admonished herself that depression was not only cowardly, but premature, and that the terror of the night was but a figment born of fatigue—an attack on the part of that legion of the unreal which assails us in the cowardly hours between our dreams and our waking.

She began to sing softly, and Thurston, listening, felt satisfied and relieved. Every doubt fled. She sang, therefore she was happy! That was enough.

He breakfasted, again in Elysium, and started out on his college duties with an air of consecration, kissing Helen a lingering farewell, and making her a little speech, while Brinton grinned appreciatively in the background. Life was beginning for them, Thurston said—full of purpose, full of new meaning. "The constant travel of the last few months has been unnatural, almost unsatisfactory; but now we each turn to the healthful distraction of our work—I to my teaching, you to your wifely little duties at home."

"Are you not coming back to-day?" she inquired, wonderingly.

"I shall be here again in an hour or two," and Thurston hurried away.

Helen returned along the wide, bare hall to her room; she closed the door, and stood with her back to it, thinking. Suddenly and furiously she stamped her foot. "Oh!" she cried, "was there ever anything so sentimental as a really and truly good man?" But the next moment she laughed; and, turning to Thurston's trunk, she searched until she found a pair of socks. "These certainly are full of new meaning," she said, thrusting her fingers through the gaping holes; and then, drawing a chair to the window, she proceeded to darn.

From her seat she could see across the small back-yard, where the red clay was pounded into a solid floor by the bare, passing feet of the negroes; two open drains made a wide delta in the middle, and beneath the window, covered with mossy, crumbling shingles, jutted the roof of an old well. To her left were the negro cabins she had seen in the moonlight the night before; beyond was a small corn-field, the stalks still standing, and at the right, a weather-beaten barn, gray with age. Under an open shed stood the cow, still lowing fitfully, and a fine mare was tethered at the gate of the barn-yard.

It was beginning to rain. Between her and the trees beyond the corn-field a thin yellow mist was rising, and the flies poured in at the open sash. "It is too warm to close it, and there are no screens," she murmured, uncomfortably watching them crawl over the bright red carpet.

Someone stopped at the window of the porch, on

the other side of the room. "If you all don't shut your shutters, Mrs. Thurston," said the landlady, looking in, "you are just going to be eaten alive. Here, let me show you." Without further ado she climbed over the sill, and, after darkening the room, turned the slats, in order to let the light fall on Helen's work. "I wish you'd tell me something I could do for you," she added, standing a moment undecidedly. "It's mighty mean and lonely having to stay all by yourself. I think the Professor ought to have let his teaching go a day or two longer, and waited on you all until you felt a little more accustomed."

"But I am not lonesome," said Helen. "I never am lonesome—only stupid and tired."

"Oh, you needn't tell me you are stupid!" said Mrs. Bruce, sitting down on the chair which Helen pushed hospitably toward her. "The Professor isn't going to bring home a stupid wife, after passing by all the beauty and talent of Tallawara." Mrs. Bruce bridled a little, and tossed her head.

"The beauty and talent of Tallawara were too grand for him," said Helen, laughing. "He was afraid of them."

"I never thought of that," said Mrs. Bruce. "It accounts for a great many things; and yet the Professor doesn't appear shy. He might have been kind of dignified and distant, and I have heard that there was those who thought he scorned our ways, but if he is shy, it is some—some——"

"Excuse," supplied Helen.

"Well, the Professor isn't one of the men that needs much excusing," said Mrs. Bruce, loyally. "But it's

a pity, for his own sake, Mrs. Thurston, that he isn't a little more social."

"But he is—very social!" exclaimed Helen, off her guard.

"For a shy man he may be," agreed Mrs. Bruce, thoughtfully; "besides you all up North are so different. There isn't much hospitality up North, you know. The people are so much colder, and so much less friendly than we all, that I don't suppose the Professor is conscious of how he keeps himself to himself; not that he hasn't a right to keep himself to himself if he wants to."

"I will tell him."

"And, Mrs. Thurston, so long as we've mentioned the subject, I might as well warn you in a friendly way that we are a warm-hearted people, and if we keep coming in on you in crowds, you must just show it if you don't like it; for we have our pride, even if we are warm-hearted."

"But I wouldn't have you stay away for worlds!"

"I'm sure you are very kind to say so, whether you feel it or not, and the ladies will consider it a privilege to come. It is always a privilege to converse with an educated lady—not that we haven't educated ladies here! Tallawara is one of the most refined and cultivated places in the State, and you will find the society fully equal to anything you ever have been accustomed to, besides bein' more—more——"

There was a knock at the door of the room, and a gigantic old colored woman stalked in, holding a monster turkey, kicking and struggling, in her arms. "Look heh, Mis' Nan, you want dis yere gobblah?

Dey's a gen'leman asks four bits fo' him—he's waitin' fo' an answer, now, down in de kitchen."

"Aunt 'Liza," said Mrs. Bruce, mildly, "you just take that gobbler out of this, and don't you never let me catch you coming up in Mrs. Thurston's room again so long as you live! I'm astonished at you, Aunt 'Liza! Mrs. Thurston will think you never had any bringing up."

"It's a fine big gobblah, Miss Nannie," insisted Aunt Eliza, her dancing eyes fixed on Helen. "A mighty fine one!"

"Aunt 'Liza, if you don't get out of here as fast as your legs will take you, I'll send for the sheriff!"

Aunt Eliza giggled, and turned to go. "I jes' hatto fine out ef you wants dis yere——"

"'Liza!"

"Come, now, Miss Nannie," coaxed Aunt 'Liza, "don't you be a losin' you temper; it'll cert'nly shorten you life—it cert'nly will!"

"You'll find your own life shortened, if you don't get out of here!" said Mrs. Bruce, in the gentlest and sweetest of tones.

Aunt 'Liza stalked to the door, and then, turning about, turkey and all, she made a sudden profound curtsey. "Welcome to de bride!" she said, and fled.

"Humph! I know her!" said Mrs. Bruce. "That's all she wanted—impertinent old nigger!"

From the kitchen below came a wild burst of noise —gobbling turkeys, negro laughter, and excited talk. "*I* seen de bride!" Aunt 'Liza's voice rose high above the din. "I tole you I gwine see huh, an' I did.

Oh, Aunt 'Liza ain't de only pusson dat ain't seen de bride!"

"You shut up!" answered the bass voice of another old woman. "Shut up, you ole Alabama niggah, you! I seen mo' brides in Vaginny dan you could shake a stick at!"

"They're nothing more than just children," said Mrs. Bruce, apologetically. "You'll have to excuse them; but you can't allow impertinence from them, either——"

"Hi! Miss Nannie," came Aunt 'Liza's voice from beneath the window. "Is you gwine take dis yere gobblah, or isn't you? De gen'leman say he cain't wait, nohow."

"If the gen'leman is that trifling old Abe from down by Masons', you tell him he can just go along about his own business; I ain't coming until I'm ready. The trouble with Northerners," she resumed, tranquilly, "is that they don't know how to speak to a nigger."

"Oh, Miss Nan!"

"Aunt 'Liza, you shut up!"

"But Miss Nan——"

"I declare that old woman needs a whipping!" cried Mrs. Bruce, rising. "You'll have to excuse me, Mrs. Thurston; I never knew her to behave so scandalous before."

She rustled out of the room in her stiff, clean dress, and a few minutes later Helen saw her cross the yard and climb the fence. She stood on the second bar from the top, scolding calmly at someone in the distance. Her soft, dark hair waved from the parting

on either side of her saint-like face. "She can't be more than thirty-one or two," thought Helen. "And she has climbed up there to keep her little shoes out of the clay——"

"Garfield!" called Mrs. Bruce. "Garfield—you Garfield! Why don't you come when you hear me calling to you?"

A half-grown colored boy shambled out of the barn, and stood in the door-way.

"When did Mr. Jim Trenholm come back?" called Mrs. Bruce.

"He ain't come back 't all," shouted the boy, sullenly.

"Who's been riding his mare, then?"

"He tole me to take her out when she needed exercisin'," said Garfield, defensively, "an' I'm jus' goin' to ca'y her in."

"He never told you anything of the kind!" said Mrs. Bruce. "You've been riding that mare to a lather, and then you go leaving her out in the rain. She's been standing there an hour and a half without any blanket."

"Fo' God, Miss Nan, she ain't been heah ten minutes!"

"Garfield, don't you dare go telling me lies like that to my face! You just come out here and carry that mare in!"

"Cain't, Miss Nannie—it's rainin'."

"Raining! Ain't *I* out here?"

"You's mighty tough, Miss Nannie, an' I ain't strong; I got a chill. I done got de worse chill I evah had."

"Aunt 'Liza!" called Mrs. Bruce. "You come here and make Garfield mind what I say."

"I'm a-comin'!" shouted Aunt 'Liza, cheerfully striding across the yard.

"And you make him feed that mare, too," said Mrs. Bruce. "I don't believe she has had a good mess of corn for a week."

Aunt 'Liza opened the gate of the barn-yard with a mighty tug, which threw further light on Mrs. Bruce's selection of the fence as a coign of vantage. Inside, she stooped and picked up a stout stick. "Come on, Ga'field!" she called. But Garfield preferred to decline the invitation.

Helen saw him stooping and running to the shelter of some bushes in the "corn-patch" at the back of the barn. Aunt 'Liza gathered up a multitude of skirts—displaying a pair of brown legs rising from ample carpet-slippers—and waded in.

"Come out, you black niggah!" she called. "If you all don't come out, I'll jus' sail in an' take de hide off'n you!—I'se afraid to go inside, Miss Nannie," she called back over her shoulder. "Dat boy chock full ob de debbil; he bound to play me some dirty trick. Hi! hi! you, niggah; come out!"

"Niggah y'own se'f!" was wafted from the corn-field.

"He's got out behind!" cried Mrs. Bruce. "He's over in Colonel Jocelyn's corn-patch! Run, Aunt 'Liza!"

Aunt 'Liza darted around the corner, her skirts lifted to her waist, and before long Helen could see her leaping in long strides toward the bushes. Garfield

crouched there until she had almost reached him; then, with a yell, he sprang out, and doubled back again. As he passed her, Aunt 'Liza clutched at his ragged coat; a piece came away in her hand, and she sat down heavily on the ground.

"Dah now, didn't I tell you he'd play me some dirty trick!" she shouted, furiously.

Mrs. Bruce jumped from the fence. "'Liza, you old fool, you!" she cried, laughing like a girl as she ran toward the gate. "You ought to know better than to try to hold him by his coat!" She stopped. Garfield was again leaning nonchalantly, although somewhat breathless, against the door of the barn. "You Garfield!" she said, quietly, "come here!"

Garfield came meekly across the yard.

"Why didn't you come before?"

"How could I come befo'?" queried Garfield, in high, angry tones. "'Tain't my fault. Ole Aunt 'Liza she done chase me all ovah de country. You jes' ask her what fo' she toah my coat? I ain't done nothin' to her, an' she needn't be doin' things to me." He crossed, as he spoke, to where the mare was hitched, and, taking the halter, turned back across the yard.

"Now you give that mare a good feed," said Mrs. Bruce, turning away.

Garfield watched her until she closed the door of the house; then, after executing a grotesque dance of derision at Aunt 'Liza, he went into contortions of laughter, that abruptly changed into a brutal "Yah!" when, giving the animal a kick with his bare foot, he ran her into the barn, hanging back with his whole weight upon the halter in her mouth.

Helen's darning dropped into her lap, and, while the smile of amusement lingered upon her face, she caught a sudden sigh. "Alas! I fear that I shall never learn how to speak to a 'nigger'!" she murmured.

III

THE WRONG TURN OF THE ROAD

THURSTON betook himself to his duties full of intense excitement. He was a quiet man, unaccustomed to self-contemplation, and the consciousness of a new life, of a fresh beginning, made him keenly, but not altogether uncomfortably, aware of his own personality. As a young married man, his sensations partook of an innocence and inexperience which placed him in the ranks of those who have the world before them. He repressed with difficulty an inclination to ask advice, and he made his advent in the chapel with a jauntiness so foreign to his ordinary demeanor that the students treated him to a round of applause, while the faces of the men, his colleagues, on the platform wore the expression of amusement always evoked by that tremendous practical joke called matrimony.

Thurston's heart warmed to them: they were "good friends of his, every man," he said to himself, and he felt a little ungrateful that he had never thought of it before. With the exception of the President, he had not hitherto cared much about any of them; but now, Yarnell's hard, mean face was idealized. "A fine, stanch fellow," Thurston characterized him, as he caught the glint of his shallow blue eyes; and Dr.

Evelyn's austere, narrow forehead and thin lips indicated neither bigotry nor spite, but the pure refinement of the ascetic. Carpenter—who chewed tobacco and sat with his feet on the table during recitations—Carpenter was a rough diamond; mainly rough, to be sure, but how much Helen might do toward his civilization! And Ellworthy—Helen would respect Ellworthy—at least, he hoped she would. A little qualm of doubt assailed him at the thought of Helen, Carpenter, and Ellworthy. But here Dr. Evelyn's abrupt "Amen!" finished the long report of the previous proceedings with which every morning he was in the habit of furnishing Omniscience, and "prayers" were over.

By some hidden reaction Thurston found himself out of sympathy with his students; it was difficult to take any interest in the work of the morning, and at noon he abruptly dismissed those who were in the habit of coming to him on Saturday at that hour for help and advice; it had been a long time since he had thought of them—Helen was not fond of boys! He gave a sharp short sigh and turned his steps homeward. "Yes, homeward;" he repeated the word pathetically; he had never known what it was to have a home——

"Professor!" It was Yarnell, who ran down the steps behind him. "I am glad," he said, "to profit by this accidental meeting to inquire for your lady. I hope she does not find our rude accommodations in too great contrast to the luxury to which, no doubt, she has been accustomed."

"Well, of course she feels the difference," Thurston said, with the utmost simplicity and truth.

Yarnell's steely eyes showed a momentary ugly

glitter. "If there is anything that actually needs reform, I will ask Mrs. Yarnell to mention it to her sister. Mrs. Bruce, as you are no doubt aware, sir, is a perfect lady."

"Mrs. Bruce is the salt of the earth," said Thurston. They had reached the foot of the stile which led from the college grounds, when Yarnell, whose path turned to the right, walked away, with an abrupt "Good-morning," and Thurston continued in the direct course; but he had not gone far when he heard himself called again; Yarnell was running back to overtake him. "I thought I would mention to you, Professor," —a slight flush rose in the pallor of his thick, white skin—"I thought that since you are evidently not comfortable at Mrs. Bruce's, you might be considering the possibility of going to house-keeping."

"Oh, we are very comfortable at Mrs. Bruce's," said Thurston, genially. "You must come and see us."

"In case, however, you do contemplate a change, I should like to draw your attention to my house beyond the Branch. For business reasons the present tenant is moving out, and I should be proud to welcome you in his place. To a colleague I should put the rent at the low figure of three hundred and fifty dollars. Our charges are not high down here; but if even this small sum——"

"It doesn't seem very high," said Thurston; "but we have made up our minds to stay with Mrs. Bruce until we settle down a little."

"I am sorry to hear you say that you feel unsettled, Professor," interrupted Yarnell, quickly. "What we need in the college is settled men; I was talking to

Colonel Tom Bixby about that very thing when he was over last week. Perhaps you are not aware that Colonel Bixby is one of our trustees?"

"I ought to know it," said Thurston, coldly. "He has been on the board for the last seven years."

"Ah, yes," drawled Yarnell; "but everybody knows your dislike of petty detail, and I was afraid it might have escaped your mind. Well, as I was saying, I was talking to Colonel Tom last week, 'Thurston will settle down,' I said. 'Now he is a married man, he will feel it his duty to take more interest in the—a—the place. He is going to make his home here. His family—I beg pardon for mentionin' it prematurely—will grow up here; here he will die, and be buried among those with whom his life-work has been pursued.'"

Yarnell stopped. Thurston had thrown back his head, and was looking at him—startled, displeased. "Live here?" he repeated. "Bring up a family, die, and be buried—here?"

"I certainly mean no offence," said Yarnell, smoothly.

"You have given none; the ideas were only novel."

"Ah, well, of course I can't see why they should be; and yet I was afraid so. Yes, I was afraid so. Good-morning, good-morning! If you feel like considering my little proposition of the house, just let me know some day when we meet. No need to mention the matter to Mrs. Bruce, I take it; when a woman is, so to speak, alone in the world, it brings out all our chivalry. Let me beg to remind you of that, Professor, in case your attention is drawn to any

further small discomforts. Mrs. Bruce is a widow—she needs your protection rather than your censure."

He turned back now toward his own house; Thurston drew a breath of relief. "It seems to me," he said to himself, "that I am always misunderstanding Yarnell; but to live here, bring up a family, die, and be buried here—I can't tolerate the thought. To live here, bring up a family—I will not think of it!" But, in spite of that, the obnoxious phrases kept time to his steps. It was one thing to linger year after year in this lotus-eating land—to linger at one's own free will, at liberty to leave when the spirit moved or the work palled in interest—it was another to be bound here, whether or no, by ties of expediency, and held here by weights of responsibility. His life-work! Was that all that Fate held in store for him? A terrible doubt surged in his breast. "Have I remained too long?" he groaned. Yet, why allow a spiteful innuendo to destroy his peace of mind and break up the calm security of years? Must a man pass through the storm and stress of youth afresh because he has married a wife?

He was walking hurriedly along the narrow boardwalk which skirted the college grounds when, not far ahead of him, he saw the President. With an impatient gesture, he slacked his pace; but the old gentleman, missing his tread, turned and came back to meet him.

"I have been waiting for you," he said. "I had hoped to have my good wishes the first to greet you, but I see that Yarnell has been ahead of me. Thurston,"—he stood still, and removed his hat—"I wish you and your wife all good things: wisdom in trouble,

strength in adversity, peace of mind in time of conflict." He paused, and Thurston, who had also bared his head, looked at him wonderingly. "Thurston!" he blurted out, a little huskily, "I hope you'll be happy! If a good man can be happy in this abominable world, you will; for you are about the best man I ever knew, North or South, white or black!"

Thurston's laugh rang out, and for a moment his lightness of heart returned to him. There were tears in his eyes, and he grasped the old man's hand warmly. "I thank you," he stammered; "I thank you."

"And now," said the President, putting his arm in Thurston's and walking with him slowly, "there is something I want to say to you. I have been trying either to say it or write it for the last six months, and I could not; but it has got to be done, sir—I can't shirk it any longer.—Thurston, do you count Yarnell among your friends?"

"Yarnell?—Yarnell?" repeated Thurston. "I have never thought of him as an enemy, and, until to-day, I don't believe that I have ever thought of him at all."

"It is time you did, then," said the President, briefly.

"But why?"

The President thought a moment. "Have you never felt that there was something—inimical in Yarnell's attitude?"

"Not until a moment ago when he contrived to make me thoroughly uncomfortable. I was trying to get rid of the impression when you turned to meet me."

"What did he say?"

"It is not so much what he said as what he implied."

"It generally is," answered the old man, with a grim smile. "I suppose he implied that you took no interest in the college; that you despised the town, and that you were anxious to find work elsewhere?"

"On the contrary, he took pains to let me know of his assuring Colonel Tom Bixby, last week, that this was not the case."

"Oh-h-h!" said the President, angrily. "Did he happen to assure you of anything else? If he did, I advise you to look into it."

"No; he only offered to rent me a house."

"What house?"

"It is a house on the other side of the Branch. He offered it for three hundred and fifty a year; the price seemed reasonable."

"Did he say anything further about it?"

"No. I am not even very clear as to its location. It didn't seem worth while to ask, as I have no intention of taking it."

The President stopped short, and withdrew his hand from Thurston's arm. "He dared to offer you that house without warning?" he cried, striking his right fist into the palm of his left hand for emphasis. "Do you know that the present tenant is going out because his whole family have had diphtheria? His wife died —yes, died, sir, six weeks ago; she and her baby. And he had the face to ask you three hundred and fifty for it, when there is not a house in town that rents for more than twenty dollars a month! Thurston, the man must think you are a fool!"

Thurston's face went very white; his mouth set in a narrow line, and his eyes turned pale with the rage of an honest man who finds himself cheated because of his honesty. "Do you mean that he wished to murder *my* wife?" he cried, in unreasoning fury.

"Of course, he didn't wish to murder anybody!" said the President. "He wanted the money; Yarnell would sell his soul for two bits—dear at the price, too!" he added, viciously.

"But what is the meaning of these insinuations in regard to my attitude toward the college?" said Thurston. "Has Colonel Bixby been expressing any dissatisfaction on the part of the trustees? If that be the case, I shall resign."

"And play directly into Yarnell's hand!"

"But what is his object—what does he expect to gain by forcing me to leave? It can't be personal spite—I never harmed the fellow!"

The President looked at Thurston keenly. Was this irritable, brief, fiery individual the sweet, scholarly gentleman of fifteen minutes before? "It's waked him up!" thought the old gentleman, always gleeful in anticipation of a fight. "It's going to do him a heap of good!—Has it never occurred to you, Thurston, that Yarnell would like to be president of Tallawara College and that, when his son Sam gets done studying English by the new and advanced methods they have invented up North, Yarnell would like to have your position vacant to offer him?" he said, slipping his hand in Thurston's arm again and walking on.

"It has not occurred to me! For one thing, Sam is

a fool; for another Yarnell is too shifty and too incompetent to be associated in my mind with any position of trust."

"He has been trying to oust me from mine for fifteen years, and I give him one year more before he gains his point. As for you he may work it in less by his present methods—they're advanced. I hope to God he got them from the North, along with Sam's culture, for they are not worthy of any honest Southern gentleman! Man, have you lived here all this time without seeing what Yarnell has been driving at? He wants to consolidate the college with the State University."

Like a flash Thurston remembered a former conversation with Yarnell upon that subject. "He has spoken to me of it," he said, slowly. "In fact, he wrote to me about it this summer, while I was in the North."

"Yes," said the President, bitterly; "and I have no doubt has your signed opinion in favor of it; he told me so—assured me that I was the only man opposed to it on the whole faculty!"

"Then he told a deliberate untruth! I showed his letter to my wife, and something about it struck her as insincere. She made me exercise the utmost care in answering it; in fact, we wrote the answer together, and I have a copy now."

The President's face cleared; his troubled eyes beamed with hearty admiration. "Now, I call that remarkable!" he cried.

"At the time I thought it very unjust."

"Woman," said the President, "is a creature of

instinct: it amounts in some cases almost to divination. They can't reason, sir—they never could; but in matters of instinct, why, sir, sometimes I think them superior to the finest setter dogs!"

He swung off as he spoke. Never before had Thurston been so annoyed and disturbed; he wanted to call the old man back, and ask for further details; he did not know what course to pursue; he could not tell to whom he should turn, who were his friends, who his enemies; he wanted help, comfort, advice,—and his first clear determination was to conceal the whole matter from his wife. He told himself that he feared giving her uneasiness; but more urgent than his fears was his aversion to acknowledging his position. The triumphant lover, the indulgent protector, the altogether adequate being who had left Mrs. Bruce's in the morning, had little in common with the lonely man, beset with enemies and uncertain of friends, who returned there at noon! Absent and full of care, he came into the room where Helen was sitting, looking idly through the slats of the shutters, her finger in the pages of a novel, and the stocking, half darned, fallen in her lap.

"I am trying to learn how to speak to a nigger," she said, with gravity.

Thurston, who had theories as to the manner in which a wife should meet her husband on his return from business, was displeased. "Have you had a good morning?" he asked, frowning slightly.

"Philip," she said, ignoring the question, but answering the frown with a travesty of one of his own maxims, "don't you know that when a husband comes

home from his work, he should always greet his wife with a pleasant smile?"

Thurston turned to the mirror, feigning to adjust his cravat, in order to hide the flush of irritation that rose to his forehead. "Have you had dinner?"

"No—of course not"—hurt in her turn that he should imagine it possible. "Shall we go down?"

Thurston did not answer, but left the room ahead of her, and hurried toward the dining-room stairs. He was troubled and pressed for time. The remainder of the afternoon would be occupied by the weekly meeting of the faculty, and the readjustment of his attitude toward Yarnell demanded quiet thought. The simple expedient of remaining at home did not suggest itself; for, in spite of the little influence which he privately believed his ten years' sojourn in Tallawara had had upon him, the faculty meeting had established an ascendancy he did not dream of disputing. All through the dinner he sat silent, rejecting one course of action after another, and responding to Helen's cheerful overtures in worried monosyllables.

For a time she persevered; but, as Thurston's taciturnity increased, she began to resent its apparent sullenness. "Has anything happened?" she asked, in a low voice.

"What could happen?" In his distraction, Thurston flashed upon her a look of genuine irritability.

She made no reply; her lip thinned in an angry curve. She could scarcely remember having ever been so addressed, by a stranger, in the whole course of her life. Then, noting the curious turn of her thought, she laughed, yawned, and, by some evil chance re-

membering the novel she had inadvertently brought with her, she put it on the table by her plate, and began to read.

"If that don't beat the Dutch!" softly commented Brinton, who sat at another table.

Thurston became aware that, in ten years' residence, the conventions of Tallawara had also established an ascendancy; this was not the orthodox conduct of a "bride." "Your book must be extremely interesting," he said, stiffly.

"No;"—without raising her eyes—"it is only a little less uninteresting."

If Thurston had only laughed! For Helen to do so would have been instinctive; but with him, at that moment, nothing short of inspiration could have suggested it. He made some hasty excuse, and left the room.

Helen read on, and did not notice that Brinton rose and went to the kitchen until Mrs. Bruce, appearing at her elbow, said: "Mrs. Thurston, let me introduce you to Mr. Brinton," and made a precipitate retreat. Helen looked up at Brinton's keen, close-shaven, humorous face, frankly amused and interested.

"I got Mrs. Bruce to bring me over," he said, drawing up a chair, and putting his elbows on the table, "because I think you need admonishing, Mrs. Thurston. We ain't going to have you setting such an example to our young ladies without giving you warning. You are spoiling all our honeymoons. Who ever heard of a bride reading a book when her bridegroom was eating his dinner? Why, it's sacrilegious, that's what it is!"

"But I am no longer a bride!" protested Helen. "I have been married three months. I am an old married woman."

"Worse and worse!" Brinton drawled, taking an apple and paring it. "Mrs. Thurston, you are adding heresy to sacrilege. I hope it's ignorance on your part; that is your only excuse. Don't you know that you are bound to be the bride until some other gay young fellow, like the Professor, goes and gets himself a wife? You can't help yourself, and you ought to act up to your position. These 'old married' airs are misleading, not to say deceitful. Besides," he spoke more slowly, and with a slight deepening of gravity, "you are at present, so to speak, the observed of all observers."

Helen's face grew interrogative. Was it possible that the man meant to warn her? His shrewd, kindly eyes studied her every expression.

"Now, you mustn't get mad," he said, quickly. "Nobody gets mad at me; and, so long as we are talking about it, I'm just going to add that, in Tallawara, we are also prone to comment on what we observe."

"I can't see that I have done anything to create remark." Helen was striving to keep a tone of annoyance out of her voice. "On the contrary, I think that I have been peculiarly circumspect and, in some cases —amiable," she added, with meaning.

Brinton laughed good-naturedly. "That's one for me; and I'm not sure I don't deserve it. I reckon you are going to be able to find out things for yourself, Mrs. Thurston, and no thanks to intruders."

Helen turned to him, impulsively. "I shall never be anything but grateful for kindness."

"That's mighty nice of you, Mrs. Thurston—mighty nice! And if you don't understand things down here, you just ask me. I'll give you the straight tip every time."

Helen rose from the table, and ran up the dining-room stairs, laughing her thanks. Brinton sat down again to eat his apple.

"She's got a mighty long row to pick before she's done with it," he said. "And I'm willing to bet something pretty she knows it, too."

IV

SATURDAY AFTERNOON

THE dining-room was in the basement, and when Helen came to the head of the stairs that led to the wide hall on the first floor she was surprised to see Miss Zoë Mason stooping in front of an old-fashioned desk or book-case, the glass doors of which were open. The girl was gathering up a number of letters which were scattered on the floor. "Is this Mrs. Thurston?" she said, replacing the letters on the shelf of the book-case, and holding out her hand. "I'm Zoë Mason. Mamma will be here, too, in a minute; she stopped somewhere up the street to talk to Mrs. Yarnell. We are coming to call mighty good and early, but mamma said you'd never feel lonelier than you do now, and she wasn't going to let the day go by without offering you the hospitality of Tallawara."

Helen was looking about for chairs, when a fat, pale woman came in at the door. "Zoë, what did you run away from me like that for?" she cried.

"I wasn't going to wait 'round all day while you and Mrs. Yarnell settled the affairs of the nation," said Zoë.

"We are mighty glad to welcome you in Tallawara, Mrs. Thurston," said Mrs. Mason. "I hope you'll do

a little something to rouse us up down here; we are getting too much behind the times for anything."

"You'd better take care how *you* say that, Mrs. Thurston," drawled Zoë. "We don't allow anybody to tell the truth about us but one of ourselves; and even then we are not always pleased." She looked defiantly at her mother.

"If you mean Jim Trenholm, there's not a word of truth in anything he says!"

"He's made you so much better than you really are in *Captives* that you don't recognize your own self, mamma," returned Zoë; "but you're there, all the same—larger than life! Of course, you've met Jim, Mrs. Thurston? He comes down to Mrs. Bruce's to his dinners."

"Trenholm?" asked Helen; "the Trenholm who wrote *Captives*."

"It is," said Mrs. Mason; "and he ought to be ashamed of it, too!"

"There, now!" indignantly exclaimed Zoë, throwing up her little hands, as if calling earth and heaven to witness her mother's injustice.

"I know that Mr. Trenholm very well," said Helen. "When my father was living, he used to come down to Great Dulwich frequently to see him. I heard last winter that he had been ill, and was ordered South. Doesn't he live in New York any longer?"

"Yes, he does," said Mrs. Mason; "and I wish he'd stay there, too!"

"You want him to die, I suppose," said Zoë, fiercely.

"There's not one thing the matter with Jim," said

Mrs. Mason, with placid obstinacy. "He's just snoopin' 'round here to write us all up again; and, for my part, I have no patience with those who are willing to give him the chance!"

"Well, for my part," proclaimed Zoë, "I should feel it an honor to be written up by Jim Trenholm—I certainly should."

"Now, what will Mrs. Thurston think of you, Zoë Mason? She'll just think you're in love with him. I'd think so myself, if I didn't see you two quarrelling every day of your lives."

"I am in love with him; it's a desperate case. I sure enough adore Jim Trenholm!" She clasped her hands theatrically, and rolled up her eyes.

Mrs. Mason laughed; but a small, worried wrinkle came into her forehead and an apologetic smile hovered about the corners of her mouth. "You better take care," she said; "if you don't, you'll just get yourself talked about.—Howdy, Anne Bruce?"

Mrs. Bruce was coming forward with the quaint calm that characterized all her motions, when her eye caught the open door of the book-case. "Who has been at this secretary?" she exclaimed, her face flushing.

"It was open when I came in," said Zoë, "and a heap of letters were all scattering about on the floor. I picked them up and put them back. I hope you don't keep your money there; you'd better count, and see if you've lost any."

"I haven't got any money to lose; but those are Jim Trenholm's letters, and I'd hate to have any of them mislaid."

Zoë sniffed. "Why don't he take care of his own letters?"

"He does when he's here."

"He hasn't gone off again?"

"He hasn't come back."

"Hasn't come back?" It was Mrs. Mason who spoke. "Why, he's been down there two weeks!"

"Fifteen days," said Zoë. "Haven't you heard from him, Mrs. Bruce?"

"No, I haven't; and I wrote to him, too—about some proof." She addressed the explanation to Zoë, who tossed her head contemptuously.

"You might know there wasn't any use writing," said Zoë; "there isn't any post-office."

"I sent Garfield, and he came back with Jim's mare —said Jim had left word to bring her home."

"Left word? Wasn't he there?"

"No. Garfield said he'd gone hunting."

"Good gracious!"

The three Southern women looked at each other: their consternation was unmistakable. Helen saw a lightning glance of warning pass from Mrs. Mason to Zoë. "I'm about as crazy over Jim as my daughter is," she said; "and, to own the plain truth, we're all of us as fond of him as we can be! And he's got no business to go spending two weeks on that old plantation considering the state he's in now. Why, the malaria's so thick you can cut it with a knife—just a green scum all over the water down there!"

"He may have gone somewhere else," suggested Helen.

"But he hasn't," Mrs. Bruce affirmed. "I told the

niggers to watch out for him. He couldn't get away without my knowing it."

"If he were ill he would let you know," said Helen. "Surely there is no cause for such anxiety?"

With one accord Mrs. Mason and Mrs. Bruce began to assure her that they were not anxious in the least; they were only a little——

"Curious," supplemented Zoë.

"Zoë Mason! I never was curious about anything in my life," protested Mrs. Mason, angrily. "And if I should be curious, I hope I could find something better to begin on than the goings and comings of Jim Trenholm!"

"Oh, mamma!" cried Zoë, "do let's let Jim drop!"

But the interest of the visit languished with the dropping of Jim, and mother and daughter left almost immediately.

"Is Mr. Trenholm so ill?" Helen asked Mrs. Bruce as they stood together in the hall.

"Oh, he's not what anyone might call sick," said Mrs. Bruce. "He's wore out, I reckon."

"Is he writing?"

"Well, no; not very much. Of course he writes some, but when he's at home he's got such a lot to do that he naturally can't waste his time. He's been putting the old mansion in order, and improving that big plantation. I'm sure I don't know where all the money comes from."

"From his books."

"I've heard that said, but I don't believe it. Nobody's going to give all that for those novels of Jim's. I reckon he—speculates, you know—in cotton futures.

It's the ruin of some of our young men. But then, gambling and making love are in the Trenholm blood, and I doubt if Jim can help it. He'd better look out, though, and quit trifling, if he don't want to follow in his father's footsteps. There, now!" she exclaimed, in answer to Helen's look of interest. "I've gone and let out the very thing I made up my mind I wouldn't!"

"Don't tell me anything more, then, if you would rather not."

Mrs. Bruce's face lighted up with the most heartfelt admiration. "That was mighty pretty in you," she said, "for I know you're dying to hear it, and I'm sure I don't see why I mightn't as well tell you! You are bound to get it from someone else, and I'd a heap rather you'd have it right first off. All the whole country knew it at the time. Don't you remember hearing of the murder of old General Trenholm about ten years ago?"

Helen shook her head.

"Well, he was murdered, down at the plantation. He went on business—just like Jim's gone—and when he was expected he didn't come home. Nobody thought anything of it for awhile, but at last the old lady got anxious and sent for him—they found him lying by the road-side, stone dead!"

"It might have been a stroke of apoplexy."

"No, ma'am; it was the stroke of a knife."

"And was the murderer caught—did they discover who did it?"

"I don't know whether they found out who did it or not; but he wasn't caught."

"Was there no clew?"

"I reckon there was too many clews," said Mrs. Bruce. "You see—well—the old General wasn't a very good man; he was a perfect gentleman, of course, but he had his ways. When they brought him home Mrs. Trenholm met the body at the gate. She never shed a tear—just drew back to let them pass. His eyes were shut—he looked as if he was asleep. 'It's a just retribution,' she said, 'a just retribution!'"

"How dreadful!"

"Yes," said Mrs. Bruce. "She'd borne with the General, alive, forty years, and never uttered a word of complaint; and it was a mean shame he should get the better of her, and wring it out of her when he was dead. It did seem as if he'd done it just for spite—he appeared so smiling and calm; but it killed her. She was the proudest woman in the State, and she'd let all Tallawara see into her heart: she died in about six months."

Helen eyed this gentle but ruthless expositor aghast. "It may have been grief," she said.

"People don't die of grief for men like the General—when they're married to them. No, ma'am; it wasn't grief that killed her, I know." Mrs. Bruce went and locked the door of the secretary. "It wasn't grief," she repeated to herself as she walked slowly away.

Helen went to her room, but she could not stay alone in it; solitude had grown oppressive. She wanted exercise, fresh air, anything! Out in the yard Aunt 'Liza was standing over a gigantic iron pot dyeing clothes. The ends of her turban, tied in a hard knot at the top of her head, stood up like a small pair of horns, and the smoke and fire swirled about her and

her kettle as, with a forked stick, she lifted the long breadths of cloth, blood-red and dripping, and hung them on the fence to dry. Helen seized her hat and left the house.

She walked rapidly—the people stopped to look back at her, wondering at her pace. The enervating inland air, laden with the odor of damp woods, blew in her face and brought the color to her cheeks; in her plain, close-fitting travelling dress and boyish hat she was in marked contrast to all the white women she met; but these were so few as to cause her to wonder. The street was crowded with negroes. A long, motley procession of them was winding up the hill which led to the little plateau on which the town was built: vehicles of every description—bullock-carts, rickety buggies drawn by shambling mules, rattling wagons, all the harness patched by rope and twine—were loaded with negroes of every shade of color and every degree of temperament: gorgeous young women in artificial flowers and towering feathers: wild, monkey-like, half-grown boys, yelling and beating their mules with a ferocity so animal as to be wholly irresponsible: sedate, fat, greasy old preachers in rusty silk hats and blue goggles: colored people walking barefoot, colored people walking shod, in the road and on the sidewalk, chattering, laughing, singing in unceasing accompaniment to the rattle of the springless carts, they all passed in one direction, a series of brown shadows in the ruddy dust of the afternoon.

It was plain that they were coming from the country. And, remembering some purchases which she wished to make, Helen retraced her steps toward the

business part of the town. The throng increased until, in front of the shops of the main thoroughfare, it overflowed the sidewalk and filled the street. Helen did not become aware that her presence was unusual until she was in the midst of it, when she saw that, with no intermission of their jostling, laughing, and gossiping, the black faces were still every one turned in her direction. Some of the young women tossed their heads, but the men laughed openly, as if they found something absurd in her dress or carriage. In particular, she seemed to strike one old fellow—who was arrayed in an overcoat that had once been a green damask curtain, figured with large pink *fleurs-de-lis*—as delightfully comic. He burst into a wild yell after she had passed.

"Look here, Uncle Penny," she heard Brinton's voice saying; "you'd better mind your manners. That ain't the way you all was taught to behave when you was young."

Uncle Penny made no answer, and Helen heard a quick step behind her. "Where you going, Mrs. Thurston? Can I be of any service to you?"

"I am out for a walk. What is the shortest way to the country?"

Brinton looked grave. "You'll find it mighty rough walking out in the country. You'd better keep to the town, Mrs. Thurston. How far do you want to go?"

"Two or three miles."

"Three miles! What can you be thinking of? I reckon one is enough. You couldn't walk three miles if you tried."

"I often walk five," said Helen; "sometimes ten."

"Well, don't you be trying to walk any five miles

to-day; you don't know how tiring our climate is. You go out this next street we're coming to until you get to the Fair Grounds; that's about as far as any lady ought to walk. *And—don't you go any farther, Mrs. Thurston.*" He spoke with an emphasis that caused Helen to look up at him. He was staring ahead, with the wary expression of a man steering in a dangerous channel. The negroes opened a narrow line for them; but as they went farther, the street became so crowded that it was almost impossible to pass. "Be careful there!" Brinton growled once, and a burly black, who had been staring at Helen, sprang aside with a terrified start.

"Is it a picnic?" she asked.

"No, ma'am; it's not a picnic, by any means! It is Saturday afternoon."

She looked uncomprehending.

"Nigger day," he explained. "Don't you have any Saturday afternoon up your way?"

"Not like this."

"You may thank your stars for that, then." He spoke with grim bitterness. "If we could abolish Saturday we would put an end to half the scandals that disgrace the South. Now, then, Mrs. Thurston, this is your street. Better go round the back way when you return, and avoid the crowd. And, Mrs. Thurston, *mind, there's no fit walking beyond the Fair Grounds*—" He stood a moment, as if he had something more to say.

"Good-by!" said Helen, who wished to be off.

"My gracious, Mrs. Thurston, I wish I had time to go with you! You tell the Professor I said so, won't

you? I couldn't get off this afternoon, to save my soul; indeed I couldn't."

"But there is no necessity," cried Helen, amazed. "I always walk alone."

He stood for a moment after she had left him; then, with a shake of the head, hurried away.

Helen returned to her former brisk pace. The street to which Brinton had led her was pleasant and wide, with large homesteads on either side of the way; but the closed shutters of the houses and the disrepair of the grounds gave her an impression of mournfulness and loss. The little grass there was grew parched and sere in a thick mat of yellow hay upon the slope that graded the sidewalk above the street, and the great water-oaks sifted their fine, lance-like leaves on the trodden clay of the pavement. The road stretched down the hill and up again, brilliant red, in contrast with the long-needled pines that stood, here and there, on the high bank above it, green with the startling vividness of a tree seen at night by lightning.

At the foot of the hill a slight, rough bridge crossed a narrow creek; Helen leaned against the railing and looked up the stream. It was bordered with some gigantic bushes of a kind she had never seen before; long wreaths of briary-stem, covered with tiny, glossy leaves, stretched thirty feet high, overhanging the water with a wonderful grace. She did not think of the Cherokee rose until "de mos' melancholiest smell" stole forth from some concealed, forgotten blossom, bringing with it the strange, hopeless languor of the night before. A negro on horseback drew up at the other side, and seemed to be waiting for some-

one. Helen glanced at him, and turned away again. "Better come ovah, Miss!" he called, after a little pause. "I 'fraid I dus' you all up ef I cross de bridge while you all's on it!" The unexpected courtesy touched her; tears started to her eyes—they were already very near the surface. She crossed, and the negro rode on, looking back until he was concealed by the rise in the road. Something in her accent, as she had thanked him, had roused his curiosity. "Wonner what fo' she cryin'?" he muttered.

Three or four houses in grounds even more extended than those on the other side crowned the top of the hill. She pictured them furnished with stately old mahogany, hung with faded damask, carpeted with dim rugs; but the shutters were closed as if for a death, and the places looked uninhabited. Then came smaller log-cabins and cottages, cheerful in yellow paint, with green blinds open and yards swarming with colored children. Here was a little church also and a school-house, and an air of cheerful, slovenly thrift characterized the whole settlement.

The Fair Grounds—so a large sign advised her—came next, and in spite of Brinton's prohibition, she pushed on beyond them, and turning to the right, to avoid the dust of the main highway, she struck down hill into another road, less travelled. She had not gone far when she perceived that her way led to a private place. At the foot of the hill a pair of rusty iron gates barred the way, and over them an arch, cut from an enormous pair of mock-orange trees, bristled in untrimmed neglect. Tall water-oaks and dark, glossy magnolias made a dense shade, and against a patch of

sky, where their lines were a little broken, she could just discern the cornice and upper part of a pillar of some high portico.

A slight exclamation of surprise startled her. She had been so much interested in the house at the foot of the hill that she had not observed another and smaller house at the roadside to her left. It was a cottage of about a story and a half, standing on a little terrace, which lifted it somewhat away from the concealment of the shrubbery that grew thick around it. The shutters were open, the windows and doors screened with wire netting, and the sashes draped with thin white curtains. Some wicker chairs stood on the porch, and a small table set for tea, with a shining copper kettle, under which burned a blue flame of alcohol. Helen took it all in at one wistful glance and passed on; she had seen, too, that in the shade of the shrubbery growing over the gate a man and a young girl were standing.

"Is that you, Miriam?" someone called from the door of the house. "Why don't you come in and have a cup of tea?"

Helen turned her head involuntarily; the man at the gate withdrew somewhat, as if desiring to conceal himself. Helen could not see his face, but he carried a shot-gun in his hand and had on a hunter's canvas coat.

"Why, James Trenholm!" cried the lady on the porch. "When did you come back?"

Helen passed on, thinking to return to the village another way, but at the foot of the street she found herself compelled to retrace her steps, for the fences

on either side joined with that of the house of the iron gates and closed all exit. As she passed the cottage on her way up, the older woman and the young girl were taking tea on the porch alone.

"So he has come back," she thought. "That puts an end to this senseless anxiety. I wonder why he tried to avoid being seen?"

She hurried homeward, with quickened interest, to tell Thurston the news, but found that he had already gone to his supper.

"Who do you think is here?" she said, as she seated herself at the supper-table.

Thurston looked up at her, and then glanced away. A curiously irritated expression came into his eyes; of late, Helen had become unpleasantly familiar with it.

"I am sure I cannot say," he answered, coldly. "Have you forgotten to remove your hat?"

"No, but I was out longer than I had intended to be and——"

"I was disappointed at not finding you here when I came in," interrupted Thurston. "I had looked forward to being the first to show you about the town."

"It was very kind of you to think of it," said Helen, with a wicked imitation of his formal tone. "Had I known of it I should have waited."

Thurston made no answer, but devoted himself to his meal with the sharpened appetite that in some natures always follows unusual mental stress. From time to time he discovered that Helen was not eating because he had neglected to hand her something; he repaired the omissions—repeatedly; with self-disgust at his own rudeness and ever-increasing ill-humor at

his wife's silent, smiling amusement. She did not attempt to interest him again in her news, but every once in a while she turned her head toward the stairway; at last a tall man came down slowly and lounged toward the other table, where he was greeted at once with a cordial babel of chaff and questions.

"Trenholm! Where in the name of sense have you been?"

"We all were beginning to think of sending out a search party!"

"Tallawara's going to investigate these mysterious disappearances of yours, Jim," said Brinton, with his usual teasing air of meaning more than he said.

Helen turned half-way in her chair. She was unfeignedly glad to see Trenholm, whose brilliant eyes, roving away from those to whom he was speaking, had taken in everyone in the room at a glance.

At the sight of the strange lady with Thurston his whole face had lighted with an impish curiosity, that gave place the next instant to incredulous amazement.

"Miss Prescott!" he cried, breaking away from his admirers and crossing the room. "You! Here!"

"Perhaps it would diminish your surprise to be presented to my wife," said Thurston, rising to shake hands with him.

"I—I cannot say that it would!" stammered Trenholm. "You never told me the name of the lady to whom you were engaged—and—really—Miss Prescott!" he paused.

"Our cards were sent to your New York address in June," said Helen, half embarrassed by Trenholm's excitement.

"That accounts for my ignorance," said Trenholm. "I left word, when I came away in March, that nothing was to be forwarded. One must do something to protect one's leisure. Do you not find it so, Professor?"

"Certainly," said Thurston. "At least, I believe so. Shall we not be seated?" He spoke so formally that Helen wondered whether the two men were on bad terms. Trenholm hesitated one imperceptible second and then crossed to a seat next to Brinton, who had been beckoning to him energetically.

"You can't go intruding on a bridal couple that way, Jim," Brinton whispered, reproachfully.

"Nonsense! She is different."

"You are mighty right there!" said Brinton, with conviction. "She is an entirely new species in Tallawara."

"How did you find that out at this early date?" asked Trenholm, with a slight air of superiority.

"I found it out with my two eyes, and I'm not going to write a book about it neither," said Brinton.

"If you'll stay with us a month or so longer, I reckon you'll find out that you haven't got the sole agency for analyzing character in this town, Jim," another of his friends announced.

"Oh, Jim's no agent; he's the patentee," said a third. "If you're thinking of prosecuting Brinton for infringement, I'll be your lawyer."

"When did they come?" Trenholm turned again and spoke in a low tone to Brinton.

"Last night," said Brinton, shortly.

Trenholm waited until he and Brinton left the

dining-room before returning to the subject of the Thurstons. "I can't imagine what possessed Miss Prescott to marry Thurston," he said, as they stopped a few minutes on Mrs. Bruce's porch-steps.

Brinton struck a match on the sole of his shoe and lighted a cigarette. "I can't see what you've got against Thurston," he said, between the puffs.

"Oh, nothing," said Trenholm, impatiently, "only —he is different."

"You observed the same thing of her not long ago," said Brinton, dryly. "It ought to be an excellent match."

"You don't understand," Trenholm went on, eagerly. "You haven't any conception of the way she has lived hitherto. Her father was a character—a wonderful old man! Restless, exacting, and yet always brilliant and interesting in every-day life. I suppose the old fellow was as much of a stimulus to his daughter as he was to the outside world. In fact, I know he was. He never appeared before her in intellectual undress; she always had the cream of his thought. Sometimes, with a man of his temperament, I must confess that it was sour cream; but it was rich! Thurston now—his ideal of home-life, as far as I've been able to make out, is a sort of Germanic idea, where a man may go about, mentally, in his slippers and dressing-gown. Did you notice how he took his seat before her this evening after I left them? That is what I mean by his being different; her father treated her like a queen, down to the smallest details of courtesy."

"Oh, well," said Brinton, "so long as you're in-

sisting so on differences, I'll remind you that married life is different."

"I'm afraid she is going to find it so—damned different! Why, you met the best talent of every kind in the whole country at old Professor Prescott's house! We of the younger generation felt we couldn't afford not to know him. He used to come up to New York from Great Dulwich, 'To breathe,' he said, and the men would gather about him like bees around a bass-tree! And his daughter marries Thurston—and comes to Tallawara! She couldn't have known what she was about."

"She knows well enough now, and she's mighty ungrateful to anyone who offers her further information, too!"

Trenholm, who was sitting on the balustrade, smoked for a while thoughtfully. "She's got the clearest head of any woman I ever met, and she's like her father—she never deceives herself," he said at last. "The winter promises to be interesting."

Brinton arose and began slowly descending the steps. Trenholm followed him, but at the gate they both stopped. "I didn't know you'd made up your mind to stay," said Brinton.

"Neither did I!" said Trenholm, lightly. "Which way are you going?"

"That depends upon you."

"I am going down to the Masons'—to see the General."

"Then I'm going home!" said Brinton, taking the opposite direction.

V

SELF-BETRAYAL

SEVERAL days went by, and Helen was surprised to find that Tallawara was wearing upon her nerves: it was her first experience of one of those thoroughly self-centred and narrow-minded communities which are easily to be found in every latitude and every clime.

"I can't speak without making mistakes," she said to Thurston, who had drawn her attention to some wholly unconscious infringement of local conventions. "I feel that if I were to stretch myself, Tallawara would crack!"

"There is ample space for anyone who is willing to stretch in the right direction."

Helen laughed. "Where is the right direction? When I do not shock their religious convictions I am sure to run counter to their literary prejudices; and whenever I am unwise enough to try to defend myself, I disclose the criminal laxity of my early training!"

Thurston did not smile; he took these people with a large, cold—though kindly—tolerance; Helen's light criticism annoyed him. "You must be careful; snap judgments are unsafe," he said.

"They are none the less amusing."

"Amusing?" asked Thurston, vaguely, as if sur-

prised at the introduction of an unexpected factor. "Oh! if you do not mean anything—" He stopped, conscious that his annoyance made itself apparent in his tones.

"Of course I don't mean anything! What are these people to us?"

"They are human beings." Thurston had a respectful reverence for his kind.

"Yes, what a pity! Humanity is a detestable species!" said Helen, goaded to levity; and catching up her hat she left the room, fastening in the pins as she hurried along the hall.

She turned in the direction of the open country. The horizon seemed wider toward the south; she felt the need of air, and sped along as if something were driving her. The gray mist of depression that enveloped her daily life had grown suffocating; she wanted to laugh, to enjoy a moment of gayety, to find the ball thrown back to her when she tossed it. "In short, I should like to speak to someone who could understand my language!"

She was pushing forward, almost talking to herself, in her vexed preoccupation. It was not, she thought, that Thurston could not see, but that he would not. He knew that she had lived in a world where free comment had never interfered with courtesy and kindliness; how often had he returned her the swift glance of amused sympathy when she ventured to illumine the foibles of those in comparison with whom Tallawara's tallest were as pygmies! To be reproved thus, as if she were a school-girl—as if she were without the judgment when and where to speak—was unendurable.

"Unendurable!" she repeated aloud, and seated herself on one of the felled gum-trees that fenced a cotton-field from the road.

She had come, all too soon, to the limit of safety. The lonely highway wound off into the melancholy dusty landscape; the trees shut in the country to a narrow circle, rounding against the sky in heavy masses, dark and unbroken but for the wide opening where the high-way crossed the hill and here and there a golden gleam as the yellow west shone through the scarce, thinned foliage. Out from the village, lumbering along in the late afternoon, came a rough wagon drawn by a bullock and a mule yoked together. An old negress in a flapping sun-bonnet, seated on a rocking-chair with a feather-bed at her back, hailed Helen cordially.

"Howdy, Miss!" she called in her friendly, mellow voice. "Howdy! Dish yere's a mighty lonesome road;" and then, as if to show that this urbanity was by no means an indication of weak amiability, she kicked the kneeling urchin, who was driving, in front of her. "G'w'on dah!" she admonished him, fingering with a proud sense of possession the brightly colored paper packages in her lap. "G'w'on! We all got ter git home befo' mawnin'."

On the side of the road a railway cutting curved, orange-red, to the right; a new turnpike stretched to the left, showing red again in every shade on its freshly broken sides, above which the coarse grass straggled, ragged and gray. Farther on a group of negro cabins—the walls broken, the chimneys fallen, the sashes stuffed with old hats and fluttering with dis-

carded rags—stood empty: refuges for the vicious stray, and more of a menace than if they had swarmed with life.

At the last rise in the ground the grotesque equipage was silhouetted against the primrose sky; the old woman turned, bowing graciously, with the motion of her rocking-chair, like an aged queen on a progress. "Good-by, Miss! Good-by, Miss!" The two voices floated back musically, then the cart disappeared, leaving Helen alone.

"The kindly fruits of the earth!" she murmured whimsically, lifted from the contemplation of her own cares by the pleasant humor of these gentle black souls; and then a swift resentful intuition of the reproof that an expression of this kind would draw from Thurston brought her back rudely to the fret and stress of self. "They also, I suppose, are human beings! And yet, if it came to doing, I would sacrifice more for them as monkeys than he would as men!" She thought for a moment of telling him so—it was rather well put; but her brow darkened with the prevision of his sudden stiffening of offence. "If he only would not take me seriously!" she mourned.

Evening was approaching, the transforming gold abruptly faded, and Helen's Northern spirit sank under the mysterious weight and loneliness of the South. It was a South she has not foreseen, huge, remote, unintelligible.

And yet she had come! In the face of warnings, of dissuasion—even of her own fears—she had persisted. Friends, intellectual equals, a well-ordered routine of life, refinement of surrounding, amusements, and even

common comfort—she had lightly sacrificed them all; and for what?

For an ideal of friendship that had become in itself the essential root of discord! For one who, after having striven years to win her, now seemed to grudge her the barest courtesies of every-day intercourse. A great wave of despair came over her as she looked forward to the colorless, cramped, unfriendly monotony of the future!

"What a fool I have been," she said aloud. "What an utter, utter fool!"

The sharp, dry crackle of a breaking branch sounded behind her; a man vaulted the tree at her side; it was Trenholm. His tread, in the high India-rubber boots he was wearing, had been practically noiseless; he carried a gun under his arm, and had apparently been hunting. Raising his hat without turning his head he hurried across the road, leaped the bank, and walked rapidly down the railway-cutting in the direction of the town. "He must have heard me!" thought Helen, as she hastened homeward, half running in fear of the gathering dusk, and loathing the thought of self-betrayal.

That evening as Helen and Thurston sat reading there was a knock at their bedroom-door, and Garfield appeared. He had put on a large pair of white gloves and presented some cards to Helen on an old, battered silver coaster, grinning the while at the superfluity of ceremony. "De gen'lemen gwine make a fo'mal call dis time," he announced. "Dey send up dese cahds fo' Mr. an' Mrs. Thurston—*bofe!*"

Helen read the cards; a slow flush mounted to her

face. "It is Mr. Brinton and—Mr. Trenholm," she said.

"Do we not see them every day?" murmured Thurston, hospitably. "Show them in, Garfield," he added, aloud.

"In here?" said Helen. "Impossible!"

"They will understand," said Thurston. "When Dr. and Mrs. Evelyn boarded here they saw all their guests in this very room."

Helen had risen; she stood a moment, her head thrown back, smiling at Thurston reflectively. Then she passed in front of the puzzled Garfield and went into the hall.

"Mrs. Thurston," said Brinton, coming forward, "I'm just plumb terrified to meet you. I told Jim that it was mighty poor manners to go intruding on a bride and groom before two weeks was up,"—his fears did not prevent his glancing at her tormentingly—"but Jim insisted on coming this evening—" Trenholm made an impatient movement, and Brinton's teasing smile broadened complacently. "The plain fact of the matter is that Jim gets more and more demoralized every time he goes North; his last importation of r's are as hard as a rat-tail file, and only this evening he gave me a regular roasting for taking off my hat to a lady on the street."

"A lady he didn't know!" supplemented Trenholm.

"That's the very reason I did it!" declared Brinton. "Just common politeness to a stranger in the town! It's the way I was brought up, and—even if I should go North for a year or two—it's the way I mean to keep on; and I'd be willing to bet you anything, Mrs.

Thurston agrees with me. You ain't going to change all your manners and ways of speech, are you, Mrs. Thurston, just because you feel that we all down here are a little more refined and polite than you are at home?"

Helen seated herself on the long black horse-hair sofa that stretched across the hall, and Brinton, glancing triumphantly at Trenholm, slipped into the place at her side; but Trenholm found himself a chair opposite Helen, greeting Thurston, who followed a few moments later, with a cool nod, while Brinton fell a victim to his early training in good manners which demanded he should rise and shake hands with his host.

"I had been expecting you in the other room," said Thurston.

"Well, you see, Professor, Mrs. Bruce has made it so mighty nice and comfortable out here that we don't need any other place," said Brinton, eying Thurston narrowly, while he noted inwardly that if the Professor wasn't in the tallest rage he ever met up with he, Brinton, was a Hessian!

For the thrill of anger that had risen under Helen's smiling glance had mounted to Thurston's head like intoxication at the sound of her amused laugh at Brinton's teasing, and at the sight of her listening, careless and serene, to Trenholm's half-audible tones. Was she indifferent that the whole fabric of their happiness was tumbling in ruins about their heads? Was she quite unconscious of the dislike in her half-closed eyes, the impatience in her uplifted chin, the contempt in the insufferable smile she had turned on him as she left the room not five minutes before?

Brinton, plying him with questions, listened to his first random answers with open gratification at being spared the mortifying acknowledgment to which he had pledged himself.

"I hope it was not you that I nearly knocked over this evening," Trenholm was saying to Helen. "While I was out hunting I discovered a letter in my pocket that I had forgotten to send, and I was tearing across lots to catch the five-forty train. I could not see your face at all, and if I had stopped I should have missed the mail; the fact is, it did not occur to me until nearly an hour later that the lonely young lady sitting there on the gum-tree in the twilight might have been Mrs. Thurston."

Helen drew a breath of relief. He could not have heard her. "You were yards down the railway-cutting before I recognized you; and, when I did, I recognized at the same time that you were probably hurrying home to supper, and I followed your good example at once."

"Wasn't it rather a long walk?"

"Not longer than usual. I have been carefully instructed as to the limitations of Tallawara."

"I fear you went somewhat beyond them this evening," said Trenholm, quietly; "farther than is safe."

Could he be talking in parables? His tranquil gaze showed nothing. Still, it was an old trick of his, and there was a dry reticence in Helen's tones as she answered, "Nevertheless, I have returned."

"Have you been instructed in all the limitations of Tallawara?" asked Trenholm. "They are by no means confined to the outskirts of the town."

Trenholm had slightly raised his voice, and Helen became uncomfortably aware of the alert attention of the other two men. "It is an early date for criticism, even if I were inclined to it," she said, fearing Thurston's disapproval of any less cautious expression.

"Have you been all this time finding out what a mighty diplomatic lady Mrs. Thurston is, Jim? Why, I discovered that before I'd even spoken to her!" jeered Brinton.

"It is an unexpected development. I offer sincere congratulations." There was neither pique nor stiffness in Trenholm's tone, only a slight indifference. "What is being done about the removal of the college, Professor?" he asked, turning to Thurston. "Unless someone moves on your side, Yarnell will succeed before next autumn. If the question came up in the State Legislature now, you would find that most of the representatives would vote his way."

"I reckon you are mistaken about that," said Brinton, positively. "There's a kind of a sinking-fund of unpopularity in the Legislature that is always at Yarnell's disposal. If he gets the college removed it will be by the skin of his teeth, and you men on the other side ought to be lobbying now for all you are worth."

Thurston moved uneasily in his chair. "I am not much of a wire-puller," he said, with the stiff smile of a man who is receiving unwelcome advice; "and I take no interest whatever in local politics."

Trenholm and Brinton looked at each other; a lack of interest in politics was an unwholesome anomaly, almost worse than not knowing how to fire a gun or ride a horse!

"Perhaps some of you may take an interest in your bread and butter," said Brinton, drily. "What's Professor Stearns going to do if he gets thrown out of this, with eight children, and nothing to turn to?"

"Why should Mr. Stearns be thrown out any more than Mr. Yarnell?" asked Helen.

"Because Yarnell's a born hustler. Yarnell will get anywhere without a single one of the requirements. Why"—Brinton's eyes took on a far-away speculative expression—"I'd be willing to wager my golden crown against Trenholm's future fame that Yarnell would get to Heaven one of these fine days."

"Done!" said Trenholm. "Who will decide the bet?"

"I'll find out myself the minute I get there, and —and—send down to let you know."

"That is too uncertain—let us leave it to Mrs. Thurston; she can—send down to both of us!"

Helen laughed, but Thurston's face remained quite expressionless; the bread-and-butter side of the college question was rankling uncomfortably. "I think that Bixby is a friend of Yarnell's—Professor Yarnell's," he corrected himself, formally; "but Wilson, who has always been warmly in favor of retaining the college here, is sure to stand by us."

"I had forgotten that Wilson represented this district with Bixby," said Trenholm. "Poor fellow! He has not much longer to stand by anything in this world!"

"Yes," said Brinton, "I saw him about ten days ago, and he didn't look as if he'd pull through the winter."

"You saw him—ten days ago?" demanded Trenholm, abruptly.

"Let me see"—Brinton spoke carelessly—"let me see. I was in Coleston two weeks ago Saturday, and I went to Lancaster Monday, but I can't remember whether I went to Ocean Bay on Tuesday or on Wednesday; at any rate, I saw Wilson Wednesday night at the Bay House."

Trenholm looked inquiringly, as if he expected Brinton to say more.

"Poor Mrs. Wilson's about tired out," added Brinton. "I took her for a short walk on the beach Wednesday evening, and she broke down completely—cried like a child. She's my mother's cousin, you know."

"Ah!" said Trenholm. "I remember that!"

"You do?" drawled Brinton. "Well, now, I thought you would."

"If Wilson should die," said Thurston, "who would take his place?"

"The Governor'd have to appoint a special election. There's been some talk up street of running Gus Johnson."

"Johnson's a silver man!" exclaimed Trenholm.

"That's true," assented Brinton; "but, you see, we all down here have kind of lost sight of gold; silver of late has been acquiring such an interest—such a romantic interest!"

"It has not acquired a sufficiently romantic interest to elect Guthrie Johnson to the Legislature, and it never will!" declared Trenholm, angrily.

"Don't be too sure of that! When a man's mort-

gages reach up to his eyebrows, silver's mighty alluring."

"I do not think that Johnson could possibly carry an election at this stage of affairs," said Thurston; "at least," he added, thoughtfully, "not without the colored vote."

Two of his hearers turned on him in surprise.

"It appears to me that for a man who takes no interest in politics, the Professor's made a pretty shrewd hit," said Brinton.

"Unless matters in Tallawara are most miraculously changed," said Trenholm, addressing Brinton, "the colored vote is as much beyond Johnson's reach as the moon. He will never get it!"

"Well, I think you'll find your miracle has come off," said Brinton. "Johnson's got the colored vote now, and he means to keep it, but nobody need worry over that. The colored vote's easy enough to manage if you set about it intelligently."

"How do you do it?" inquired Helen.

Trenholm smiled.

"There are questions, Mrs. Thurston, that diplomatic ladies in Tallawara don't ask," said Brinton; "but so long as the count remains in the hands of respectable citizens—members in good standing of the Tallawara First Church, say—you may be mighty sure that the colored vote will be wisely ordered for the Grace of God and the good of the Democratic Party!"

"What is the Democratic Party?" asked Trenholm.

"There you are now, Jim, as bad as Pontius Pilate! He was always asking questions that God Almighty himself couldn't answer! I beg your pardon, Mrs.

Thurston!" Brinton addressed Helen, but his eyes were fixed on Thurston, who had frowned disapprovingly.

"But what do you mean by saying that Johnson has the colored vote?" persisted Trenholm.

"Oh, come!" said Brinton. "You needn't pretend you are blind to the meaning of Johnson's brand-new friendship for the people out at the Mission. A man like Gus isn't going out there calling three nights in the week for nothing at all; of course, a pretty young lady's a mighty pleasant blind——"

"See here, Brinton!" Trenholm's voice rose indignantly. "Is Gus Johnson's name one with which to associate any woman's?"

"If the young lady's own father doesn't object to it, I don't see what call you all have for protest. Old Mr. Long and his daughter were parading with Gus all over town the afternoon he and his daughter got back from Ocean Bay. Openly! In the day-time!"

"In all the time I have been here," said Thurston, thoughtfully, "I cannot remember having seen Mr. Long walking with a single gentleman of the place, and I have never met him myself more than eight or ten times. Do either of you know him?"

"I don't," said Brinton, sharply, "and I'm not saying anything against him; but I don't want to know him!"

A silence followed the sudden heat of Brinton's outburst. "Trenholm, I suppose you do not happen to know Mr. Long either?" Thurston spoke, to put an end to the pause, which was growing embarrassing.

Trenholm hesitated, turning a deep red.

"For that matter, everybody knows him," said Brinton. "He comes into a store where we all are sitting, and he buys something. He says, 'How do you do?' and we say, 'Howdy?' then he goes out again; but I don't call that really knowing a man."

"I have seen him at Miss Locke's once or twice," said Trenholm, reluctantly.

"Miss Locke had better look out how she pushes the liberality of Tallawara people too far!" said Brinton.

"I hardly think," said Trenholm, coldly, "that outside comment is likely to disturb Miss Locke in her friendships."

"Well, it would be a good sight better job if it did," rejoined Brinton. "Miss Locke's too fine a lady to waste her time messing with those white darkeys over at the Mission."

"Brinton!" said Trenholm, sharply.

"All right," said Brinton, obstinately. "I mean it. In the eyes of every true Southern lady and gentleman they are no better than the negroes they choose to associate with. They needn't to have done it if they hadn't wanted to; it was entirely optional with them whether they came down here or stayed away; but now they have come, it's optional with us how we treat 'em!"

"If you should meet one of those ladies, you know that you couldn't be rude to her if you tried," said Trenholm, rising. "Good-night, Mrs. Thurston. Brinton never knows when to go!"

"For that reason I'll take mighty good care not to meet 'em! And it isn't time to go, either!" said Brin-

ton, following Trenholm's example with undisguised reluctance. "What did you mean by carrying me off like that?" he protested, when they reached the gate. "I was just beginning to enjoy myself."

"Yes," said Trenholm, "and a nice topic you had selected for the entertainment of those two Northerners!"

"You think I'm going to believe you turned on me like a tiger that way just to save the feelings of Thurston and his wife? No, sir! And just here and now I'll take the liberty of mentioning to you that the advice I would offer Miss Locke will apply to one of Miss Locke's friends a heap sight better than it does to her."

"Very well, then, if you happen to know any of Miss Locke's friends who need it, you might give it to them."

"Thank you," drawled Brinton. "A friend of Miss Locke's, who's been spending the last ten days at Ocean Bay with old Mr. Long and his daughter, would be much benefited by a little sound horse-sense —if you'll send him to me I'll see that he gets it."

Trenholm drew himself up angrily; then he laughed softly. It was the half-embarrassed, gleeful gurgle of impenitent youth caught red-handed; it reminded Brinton of many a childish scrape they had shared in common, and he laughed in return.

"How did you find out?" asked Trenholm.

"I was down there myself."

"Was anyone with you?"

"No."

"Then nobody knows?" There was unmistakable relief in the tones.

"Ain't I enough?"

"Oh, you!" said Trenholm. "I'm safe with you!"

Brinton gave a disapproving "Humph!" through which ran evident gratification at Trenholm's trust. "Good-night," he added, starting off at a swinging pace down the street.

"Helloa! Where are you going?" called Trenholm, whose way lay in the opposite direction.

"I'm going to make a call on General Jim Mason," said Brinton, looking back; "and as you've spoiled one visit for me this evening I'd thank you to just keep out of this one!"

VI

AT THE GUTHRIE MANSION

"WHO is Mr. Long?" asked Helen of Mrs. Bruce when, after a careful reconnoissance through a crack in her bedroom door, that lady appeared in the hall after Trenholm and Brinton had left.

"Oh, he's a man"—Mrs. Bruce would have naturally said a "gentleman"—"who came down here to teach the niggers just after the war. I'm sure I don't know what he did it for. We've got plenty good enough colored schools of our own, where we learn 'em all that's good for 'em, without living with 'em and eating with 'em and making ourselves one of 'em."

"And Miss Locke,—does she belong to the Mission, too?"

"She says she hasn't any mission—to the colored people;" there was an almost imperceptible emphasis on the "colored."

"Does she mean she has a mission to the white people?"

"Nobody can tell what Miss Locke means and what she doesn't!" said Mrs. Bruce, impatiently. "She just smiles at you with her eyes, and if you understand—you do; and if you don't understand—you don't, and that's all there is to it!—Perhaps she thinks she has a

mission to Jim Trenholm!" Mrs. Bruce added spitefully.

"She is not a Tallawara woman, then?"

"Of course she's not a Tallawara lady! She's a stranger from the North, and she's taken up those Longs because she thinks the girl's pretty; but she'll soon find out that Tallawara isn't going to stand it!"

"Does she know of the prejudice against them?"

"'Tain't prejudice; it's just plain decency! And if Miss Locke isn't aware of it after living down here eleven years, all I can say is, she's a heap stupider than she appears."

"Miss Locke has by no means the appearance of stupidity!" said Thurston.

"You'd better be looking after the Professor, Mrs. Thurston! He's a great admirer of Miss Locke!" said Mrs. Bruce.

Thurston looked annoyed. "She is some relation of Trenholm's, isn't she?" he asked.

"As if you didn't know!" said Mrs. Bruce, archly. "Her father was a second cousin of the old lady's," she added. "Jim lived at their house when he went up North to college. She'd marry Jim Trenholm to-morrow if he'd ask her."

"Preposterous!" said Thurston, impatiently; "she's a woman of at least five-and-forty!"

"Oh, she's all of fifty, and more too!" said Mrs. Bruce, who, without the slightest unamiable intention, invariably added five or ten years to everybody's age, on principle. "But when an old maid like that falls in love with a young fellow like Jim Trenholm, age ain't much of an obstacle. She don't deny it, for

I taxed her with it to her face, and she just smiled that everlasting smile of hers and said if I'd only be kind enough to let her have her choice, she'd rather be a mother to Jim Trenholm than anything else, because she preferred to have some lasting hold on his affections."

"Oh, I wish I knew her!" said Helen. "Has she no family? Does she stay here all the time?"

"My no!" said Mrs. Bruce. "She's off whenever the notion takes her. You see, she's rich. I reckon she's got as much as eight or nine hundred dollars a year; but as for her family, I really don't believe, Mrs. Thurston, she values them as she ought. Mrs. Mason asked her once if she didn't have no relations, and she said of course she did; what else would she be living way off here for?"

Helen laughed. "You must get her to come and see me," she said to Thurston.

"Oh, he'll do that quick enough! But I hope you were good and sure you were off with the old love before you were on with the new, Professor!—Everyone in Tallawara used to think he and Miss Locke 'd make a match of it before you appeared on the scene," she said to Helen, and then hurried away, calling back when she reached the bottom of the basement stairs, "I reckon I'd better flee from the wrath to come!"

Thurston started toward his room; his face was flushed and he was extremely angry. Helen followed, still laughing.

"This constant banter as to the relation of the sexes becomes intolerable!" he said, irritably.

"Why should you mind? She had just bestowed

Miss Locke on Mr. Trenholm not two minutes before."

"It is an indignity, a desecration!"

"Oh, everybody understands it!" Helen sat down by the table and took up the book she had been reading when Brinton and Trenholm had interrupted her.

Thurston went to a far corner of the room and seated himself in the shadow, his hands in his pockets, his legs stretched out before him. It was a desecration of his love, an indignity to his wife, to speak of him in connection with any other woman; and if Helen had felt a spark of the same feeling for him that he had for her, she would have divined this! As it was—she did not know; she did not even care!"

"Have I taken your place at the lamp?" asked Helen, politely.

"No."

She rose, nevertheless.

"I beg that you will not move," he said, impatiently; "my eyes are hurting me."

And so they were, stinging and smarting with a feeling almost of tears in the bitterness of his disappointed vexation and loneliness. She looked at him undecidedly as he sat there, still with his back toward her, on the stiff, small chair, with his arms folded and his head on his breast. Was he possibly nursing his wrath yet over her receiving Trenholm and Brinton in the hall? "Philip, do stop sulking," she said, with exasperating good-nature, "and come here and talk; I have something to say to you."

"I can hear from where I am."

Helen toyed with her book a few moments. It was

not the first time that Thurston had taken this attitude. Morally, at least, he had frequently turned his back upon her in the last few months, but they had been at various small summer-resorts, and she had persuaded herself that he was weary of uncongenial surroundings, and that when they came to the quiet of home life in Tallawara his manner would change. It had; but not in the direction she had hoped, and she was beginning to grow impatient of his persistent sullenness. She had never for an instant essentially failed in the firm and loyal friendship she had felt for him when she married him. "There is no one I care for more than you," she had written to him when they were first engaged. "I do not pretend that love has never knocked at my heart; he may have even pushed open the door, a narrow crack; but I was strong enough to close it again before I saw his face. I am not sorry that I cannot feel anything of the same kind for you, because I want to begin our married life with the noble friendship and esteem that other married people end with. We will skip the usual, sickly probation that is at the bottom of all misunderstandings; people cannot keep it up every day, and on the days when it is not kept up they are always blaming each other, alternately, like a chill and fever."

Thurston had announced himself satisfied with this ideal of married life; in fact, he had laughed at it, feeling in his heart that it was a piece of witty reticence and maidenly reserve. It is very difficult to make a man believe that he is not beloved by the woman who is willing to marry him.

Unconscious of having given him any just ground

of offence, Helen tried to return to her reading, but Thurston's brooding silence became oppressive and she abruptly put down her book. "Why can't we go to housekeeping?" she said. "I have been thinking of it ever since the first day we came; we shall never be able to stand this!"

"It is the best the town affords."

Helen cast a comprehensive glance about the room and shrugged her shoulders. "But we can afford better! It is not as if we were buying furniture or going to any expense," she urged. "There are all my things, more than enough for our needs. They are here now, by the way; the freight agent sent me word this morning; and—really, Philip, you must see that this crowded place is impossible; quite impossible. One doesn't quite respect one's self without a little more elbow-room."

"I regret that I have brought you to a place that you consider unfitting," said Thurston, stiffly. "I have lived here myself ten years and found it clean and quiet. The table is generous and abundant. Mrs. Bruce, besides, is a perfect lady, dependent for her livelihood on the success of her house; I do hope, therefore, that you will be careful—" He stopped and began walking hastily up and down the room. The echo of insincerity in his own voice had cut him short; his very words had been a repetition of Yarnell's; he was making false excuses for denying Helen's request, because he found himself growing angry—justly angry—at her way of making it. Oh, yes, money was short, his position was insecure—he meant to explain this to her in due time—but these things were trifles compared to the fact that

she wanted to get away from him! He had never found things crowded; he had never suffered for elbow-room; the narrower the space, the better; the closer the quarters, the nearer! For himself, he never wanted her from under his eyes, while she——

Thurston left the room.

"What have I done now?" murmured Helen.

"Mrs. Thurston," said Mrs. Bruce, putting her head in at the door a few minutes later, "did Jim Trenholm and Henry Brinton say anything to you about the Thanksgiving picnic to-morrow?"

"No," said Helen.

"I knew they'd forget it!" said Mrs. Bruce. "But the young people have been planning to have a picnic and a dance down at the Guthrie Mansion, and they all said they'd be right pleased if you and the Professor would attend. You see, since the war, Thanksgiving's kind o' forced on us. The negroes all want to get off that day, and as they'll go whether we let 'em or not, we've just got to make the best of it. Not that we ain't thankful every day of our lives," Mrs. Bruce added, thoughtfully. "Down here we don't just save up all our gratitude to our Maker until the last of November! So if you'll let me know in the morning, after you've consulted the Professor, I'll send word to Jim Trenholm to bring his carriage for us."

To Helen's surprise Thurston was anxious to accept this invitation, and late on the next afternoon they started for the Guthrie Mansion. It lay deep in the country, some ten miles away, and belonged to the politician Guthrie Johnson. It had not been used since the war, but Johnson was proud of it, and never allowed

it to fall into disrepair; the polished floors were kept in excellent order, and when the candles were lighted in the great crystal chandeliers the rooms were delightful for dancing.

They did not reach the plantation until sunset, and Trenholm asked Helen to take a short walk, as later it would be too dark to see the grounds. They descended the terraces, that once had been so carefully graded, to the banks of the yellow, crawling river, and Helen seated herself on a broken iron bench and looked back at the house. In the hazy twilight the tall white pillars of the porch and the broad pediment-shaped gable had the mysterious dignity and lonely melancholy of some forgotten temple. "It is something like your house in Tallawara," she said.

"It is handsomer; ours was built first, and old Billie Johnson—the present Johnson's grandfather—improved on my grandfather's plans. It is the Johnson way. When Gus Johnson's father built his law-office, up in the village, the contract called for three rows more of brick than there were on my father's office across the street."

"And how about the next generation? Of course you and this Mr. Johnson"—she nodded toward the house—"are rivals, too?"

"What do you mean?"

There was a sharp challenge in Trenholm's voice that caused Helen to look at him in surprise.

"I beg your pardon," he said, hastily. "I don't like Johnson—of course I am here at his house—but that is more like a hotel; we—we always manage to pay him somehow or other for the use of it; but there are other

reasons.—Let us change the subject. Tell me, truly, now that—Brinton—is not here, how you like Tallawara."

"I was wondering a moment ago, when we first came out, whether there was not a kind of sorcery about this country; it is beginning to acquire an uncanny hold upon me. I do not like it, and yet—I shall be loath to leave it!"

"If Thurston should stay here ten years longer its beauty and its languor would take possession of you; you could never escape; or, if you did, it would be only to return."

"If Philip stays ten more years we are probably here for life," said Helen; "so I am assured of a contented future."

"You are happy, then?" He was throwing small stones into the water, carelessly.

"How could I help it? Everyone is so kind."

"I know that they are kind, but you do not care for any of them; you are quite alone."

"You forget; I have my husband."

"No," said Trenholm, deliberately, "I have not forgotten that."

"If I really were unhappy, your question would be frightfully indiscreet; as it is—" The slight, insincere smile that barely curved her lips filled Trenholm with an unreasonable irritation.

"People who are happy," he interrupted, with a touch of brutality, "do not call themselves fools!"

"Not even when they inhabit their own paradise?"

"You have never been a candidate for the fools' paradise, Mrs. Thurston."

She looked thoughtfully away, neither resentful nor angry: she had known Trenholm a long time. "So you heard me, after all, last evening?" she said at last. "I understood you otherwise. Do you think you have been quite fair?"

"Could I help hearing?"

"You could have forgotten."

"I could not! We have been too firm friends! Tell me—why are you unhappy?"

But Helen, still watching the river, did not answer.

Trenholm's pulses beat a little faster. "Don't tell me!" he exclaimed, impulsively. "There was no need for me to repeat the question."

Helen rose and walked a few steps nearer the edge of the bank. Something within her rebelled at this intrusion. "Don't you think your imagination is investing me with a somewhat professional and literary interest?" she asked, lightly.

"No, my interest is personal, and my imagination has nothing to do with it!" He came and stood above her on the terrace.

"It sounds like a scene from an old-fashioned romance!"

Trenholm did not speak for a few moments, then, "Your voice betrayed you last night," he said at last, "and your eyes betray you now."

Helen's face hardened; she looked up at him, unflinching.

"You cannot deny what I see in your eyes," persisted Trenholm.

"And what do you see in my eyes?"

"Despair."

Helen's eyelids suddenly dropped. "How melodramatic!" she said; and turning from him she sauntered back toward the house.

But she was more shaken than she cared to acknowledge; emotion had heightened her color, and as she stood a moment in the doorway of the dining-room, those strangely wise Southern maidens glanced at each other with intelligence.

"You better watch out, Zoë," said one of them. "Jim's been making love to Mrs. Thurston." The rest laughed and went on preparing the supper, for no one but its temporary object took Jim's love-making seriously.

"Don't you want to see the house?" asked Mrs. Bruce when, after supper, she heard Helen refuse to join the dancing. "It's an elegant example of a real old Southern mansion. Do you know that the handles of the bell-pulls and most of the door-knobs downstairs here are solid silver?"

Helen looked at the blackened objects in surprise. "They might just as well have been brass," she said; "and I should think they would be stolen."

"Oh, no," said Mrs. Bruce. "White folks wouldn't touch them, of course, and the niggers are afraid; they think the house is haunted. Come, let's go upstairs."

Helen followed her willingly, glad to get away from the music and the noise. The broad, beautiful stairway led up to a wide hall, on either side of which were enormous chambers; they were half-furnished yet, and the old-fashioned silk dresses that had belonged to a former generation still hung in the gigantic mahogany

wardrobes, while a great collection of antiquated bonnets filled up one enormous chest of drawers.

"Those belonged to Gus Johnson's grandmother," said Mrs. Bruce. "She was crazy about old bonnets; she had one for every year from 1810 to 1860. We didn't have many new bonnets down here after the war —you all took mighty good care of that."

"You have all the material here for a fancy ball," said Helen, who made a point of ignoring allusions of this kind.

"You couldn't find anybody who'd be willing to put them on," said Mrs. Bruce. "Why, even the niggers are afraid of them! and when a darkey's afraid of finery, it means something! Haven't you ever heard that this place was haunted? You get your washerwoman to tell you,—Ailsa knows a lot about the Guthrie Mansion." Mrs. Bruce looked at Helen with the air of one who, with a little urging, would impart further information; but suddenly her attention was diverted. "Haven't I seen you wear this?" she asked, darting to a table and catching up a thin white apron that had apparently been thrown there.

"It can't be mine."

"It is," insisted Mrs. Bruce. "How long have you missed it?"

"I haven't missed it; I sent it to the wash Monday."

"Ah!" said Mrs. Bruce, significantly.

At that moment Johnson entered from another door; he glanced at Mrs. Bruce's hand and colored a deep, purplish red. "Is that yours?" he stammered. "I wonder how it got here?"

"No, sir, it ain't mine!" said Mrs. Bruce, "And

I reckon you know how it got here a heap better than you're willing to let on."

"Aunt Clemmy's been down here cleaning," said Johnson, recovering himself. "Very likely it belongs to her."

This was too much for Mrs. Bruce. "Clemmy!" she cried, angrily. "That apron was sent to Ailsa to wash, and it belongs to Mrs. Thurston!"

"She doesn't seem to claim it," said Johnson, looking after Helen, who had walked away.

"She's too much of a lady to make a scene!" said Mrs. Bruce.

"I wish other people were more like her!" returned Johnson, with an impudent grin.

Mrs. Bruce fled from the room. "I'm just too mortified for anything," she said, when she had rejoined Helen, who was standing on the landing watching the dancers below. "Of course things like that have got to happen, but——"

"Better let it pass," said Helen, indifferently. "What does it matter?"

"Of course," repeated Mrs. Bruce, giving her a glance of astonishment; "but you being from the North, I didn't know how you might feel about such things."

Helen did not seem to hear; her eyes were following Trenholm and Zoë Mason, who had just then stopped dancing. Trenholm offered the young girl his arm, and, leaning over her with exaggerated devotion, began to fan her violently as they walked down the hall together. Helen smiled involuntarily.

"I don't wonder you laugh!" said Mrs. Bruce.

"The way Zoë Mason carries on with Jim Trenholm's just too absurd! It was all well enough to pretend that she was engaged to him so long as she was a little tot of ten and he was a grown man, but it's past a joke now, and she ought to have sense enough to know it."

Zoë and Trenholm had turned toward a cosey niche under the stairs. Mrs. Bruce bent over the railing. "I know there ain't but one chair in that corner, for I took the other out myself when I was pouring the coffee at supper. Oh, *Oh!*"

"What is it, Anne Bruce?" Trenholm's voice came up from below.

Mrs. Bruce hastily withdrew. "Well, I don't care if he did hear me!" she said, as she hurried to overtake Helen, who had started down the stairs. "It's plumb disgraceful! spreading out the train of Zoë Mason's dress and sitting down on it!"

Helen laughed outright.

"There's such a thing as carrying our liberality too far, Mrs. Thurston!" Mrs. Bruce spoke with reproving warmth.

"But it is funny, and it puts Mr. Trenholm in a new light." Helen laughed again, but remembering Trenholm's voice and face as they stood by the river, her face sobered.

"It's scandalous!" persisted Mrs. Bruce.

"It is—instructive."

Zoë and Trenholm remained as they were, however, in spite of comment; and about half an hour later one of the younger men came up to Brinton and remarked jeeringly that Jim had got the better of him again.

Brinton half turned and looked down at his informant

over his shoulder; his habitual good-humored, lazy smile never left his lips, but his eyes glistened beneath the lowered lids. " Miss Zoë's welcome to amuse herself with Jim or any of the rest of you as much as she pleases, but it would be mighty hard to get the better of me this evening, for I'm the man—and the only man —that's going to take Miss Zoë home. It's the man that takes the lady home that beats. Isn't it, Professor? "

Brinton addressed the last of this speech to Thurston, for his tormentor had hurried away.

" I suppose it is," said Thurston, dubiously.

" I reckon you all ought to be a little more sure of it than that," teased Brinton. " It seems to me, Mrs. Thurston, that there's something here that demands an explanation."

" There are so many things that demand an explanation; for instance, where do you think Miss Mason is going now? " said Helen, smilingly nodding at Zoë, who, wrapped in a long hooded cloak, was passing swiftly down the hall with Trenholm.

Brinton wheeled about and hastened after them toward the door, but everyone seemed to get in his way and his path was strewn with wordy apologies. When he came out on the veranda, Trenholm had seated Zoë in a buggy and was about to follow her; but Brinton cleared the steps at a rush, and with a cat-like agility, amazing in so tall a man, sprang to Zoë's side, shouted a warning to the negro who held the horse, and drove off, hatless but triumphant.

" I didn't think you'd try to play me a trick like that, Miss Zoë! " he said.

"It's lucky for you, Mr. Brinton, that it failed; for if it hadn't, upon my word, I'd never have forgiven you!"

Brinton drew in the reins, and as the horse quieted a little from the frantic pace at which they had started, he leaned toward her; her face had a thin, pinched look; her eyes were dark and unsmiling. "As it is, it'll be a long time before you forgive me for not letting it succeed," he said, ruefully.

The young men who had followed Brinton to the porch trooped back into the house with noisy laughter. Trenholm came with them and related the tale of his discomfiture gleefully and unabashed to the guests he had been upon the point of deserting.

"It is delightful that Trenholm can be such a boy," said Helen to Thurston when the time came for them to go home, and they stood on the porch together while he helped her put on her wraps.

"We are not all of us quite superannuated yet!" remarked Thurston, jauntily.

The carriage had drawn up at the foot of the steps where Mrs. Bruce was waiting with Trenholm. Thurston, following Helen closely, put her into the back seat, and then, with an embarrassed laugh, climbed in beside her.

Mrs. Bruce looked up into Trenholm's face. "Before I'd let myself be outwitted that way twice in the same evening!" she cried. "Jim, you're getting sure-enough old!"

"I am afraid that you are the sufferer this time." Trenholm's tones were quite silken. "The front seat is not so well protected—you are sure that you will not take cold?"

Thurston jumped out of the carriage, awkward and apologetic.

"Nonsense, Professor! You just go back to Mrs. Thurston. You all been separated about as long as you are able to stand it. 'Tisn't the first time I've ridden home on the front seat with Jim Trenholm—colder nights than this, too—and he never gave my comfort a thought!" She took her place as she spoke, and Thurston got in again at Helen's side.

"Are we all happily arranged?" asked Trenholm. "I know that I am; Mrs. Bruce and Thurston have declared for themselves; and as for Mrs. Thurston—what more could she want? She has her husband!"

"Well," said Mrs. Bruce's voice, raised defiantly above the clatter of the horses' hoofs on the brick-paved carriage drive, "I reckon that's about enough. What more should she want?"

The sudden quiet of the dirt-road followed, and Thurston's hand went out searching for Helen's, but she seemed absorbed in watching the moonlit country. From the black shadows of the oak groves a flaring cabin-door, here and there, showed the negroes keeping holiday. Wild, sweet soprano voices called out from time to time in curious minor melody and were answered from a distance by clear tenors that had the disturbing quality of a clarionet. Thurston's arm stole about his wife's waist; he drew her toward him; roughly, almost, it seemed to her resisting spirit. Trenholm half turned his head. Helen's cheeks burned in the darkness, and her eyes were filled with tears of annoyance.

"I beg you to let me go!"

Thurston stooped and kissed her.

"How dare you!" Helen whispered, angrily; hoping that under cover of the stream of harmless gossip with which Mrs. Bruce was entertaining Trenholm she had not been heard.

Thurston released her at once and sat back sullenly in the corner of the carriage. He had stood watching the spontaneous drollery of the evening until he had begun to feel as if he had lingered thus for his whole lifetime outside of all that made the joy of living; and the delicate, strenuous earnestness of his own boyish days looked pale and gray beside the warmth and color of this garment of eternal youth flung off and on with so careless a grace by Trenholm and his kind.

VII

THE MISSION

ON the outskirts of Tallawara beyond the Fair Grounds and the small church that Helen had noticed in her first walk, the highroad dipped down a hill and then mounted steeply again, passing a large wooded estate on the left. Hidden by the trees stood a low, white house with a wide porch, twined thick with roses and wistaria; in front there once had been a garden, the empty beds of which were still marked out in borders of broken brick, set saw-fashion, with the pointed corners standing up like the teeth of a shark; a rail-fence separated the grounds immediately about the house from a bare field that stretched away from it at the back, and in the far corner of this were two or three negro cabins. A small barn, a carpenter shop, and a smithy stood on the other side of the highway just above the short cross-road that led to the Trenholm mansion.

It was noon on the day following Thanksgiving, and the wild scream of liberated children as the bell on the village clock struck twelve proclaimed that, somewhere, school was out. Two stalwart negroes had stalked from the smithy, and old Louis, a servant of Trenholm's, came out from a gossip with his brother, the bent, yellow carpenter, who followed, brushing the

shavings from his apron as he stepped down from his little shop. The four stood together a moment and looked toward the other side of the hollow, where a girl was descending the hill.

"Miss Miriam do look fresh as a pink dis mawnin'," said the carpenter, admiringly.

"She cert'nly is a lady!" said the blacksmith. "Y'aint gwine ketch huh takin' tea with my old woman, like Miss Edwards!"

"She'd be sure 'nuff han'some, yo' Miss Mi'iam would," said Louis, condescendingly, "if 'twasn't fo' de misfortune ob huh hair."

"Hu'h! I'd like to know what de matteh wid Miss Mi'iam hair?" demanded the blacksmith's companion. "You all' jus' showin' you' ign'rance, ole man! Ailsa done tole me Mis' Thu'ston say dat Miss Mi'iam got beautiful hair, an' Mis' Thu'ston's not any countrified Tallawara lady, Mis' Thu'ston's from de Norf!"

"De ain't any ladies in de Norf, Hannibal," answered Louis. "An' if 'twasn't fo' y' own ign'rance you'd know it. Not as I'm a-blamin' you fo' what you cain't help—y' ain't neveh wu'ked fo' any ob de real quality——"

"Ain't wu'ked fo' de quality!" shouted Hannibal. "Ailsa 'n me's neveh wu'ked fo' nothin' else."

"Ailsa's one," said Louis, calmly, "an' you is anodder."

"He—he," interjected the carpenter. "You all spoke de trufe dat time, Louis, if y' ain't neveh done it befo'!"

"Who is I wu'kin' fo' now?" demanded Hannibal. "Is I wu'kin' fo' Gen'ral Bill James Mason, or isn't I?

Was I diggin' you' gyarden beds down at Mars' Jim Trenholm's las' week or wasn't I?"

"Yes, Hannibal, you was diggin' Mars' Jim's gyarden beds las' week, you suttenly was, but you was wu'kin' fo' *me* dat time. I felt mighty 'sponsible 'bout dat, fo' when Gen'ral Bill James saw you dere an' hired you he done did it undeh a mistake."

Hannibal was infuriated. "Wu'ken fo' you, you triflin' ole niggah! If you wasn't Ailsa's fader I'd take de hide off'n you!"

"Why cain't you all let Hannibal alone, Louis?" said the carpenter. "'Tain't decent to be tormentin' y' own daughteh's husban' dat-a-way."

"She ain't no chile o' mine! My chillen's hones', dey is! Hannibal, how come yo' fine wife to weah Mis' Thu'ston's ap'on down to Gus Johnson's?"

"Ailsa ain't been to Gus Johnson's! An' I done took Mis' Thu'ston's ap'on home dis mawnin'; ole Aunt Clemmy come in to ouah house an' borried dat ap'on. Dat Clemmy's a sassy ole niggah; she let on she think dat ap'on was Ailsa's——"

"Yah—yah!" sneered Louis. "Ev'ybody knows Aunt Clemmy'll take de blame ob anything Gus Johnson pays huh fo'. Der's Paley now; mebbe Aunt Clemmy——"

There was a shout of laughter from the other two negroes. "You shut up yo' mouf!" thundered Hannibal, advancing threateningly.

"Fo' de lan' sakes don' go to fightin'!" implored the carpenter. "Dere's Miss Mi'iam right onto us!"

They drew up on one side of the road, bowing ceremoniously as the girl went by; she smiled, indifferently,

and walked on toward the house. There was still a rose or two on the almost leafless stalks in the garden, and as she stooped to pick one, a little old gentleman crossed the porch and came to meet her. There was enough resemblance between them to show their relationship, although the girl's tall figure almost towered beside that of her father.

"Were the children troublesome to-day?" he asked.

"No, they were very good; when you once get hold of them, discipline is easy."

"I hope you take pleasure in it, my child," he said, not looking toward her. "It is a great work—a great work! The privilege of uplifting this down-trodden race is a very precious one!"

"I am glad to help you, father."

"Not me! Not me!" He raised his hand in protest, and then sighed. "Miss Simmons and Miss Edwards are waiting for us," he added. "It is well not to be late, if we can avoid it."

Miriam hurried forward to the dining-room, where two middle-aged ladies were already seated at the table, sweetly but evidently impatient. Miss Simmons, the elder, was a little round woman with snow-white hair curling in puffs and waves about a pretty but gently obstinate old face. She had been teaching at the Mission since Miriam was a baby, having come there at the time of Mrs. Long's death, which occurred shortly after Miriam's birth. Miss Edwards, tall, thin, dark, and eager, was much younger than Miss Simmons and had been in the work five years; while Miriam, who was sent North very young, had hardly lived in Tallawara a year. It had been understood that she was

to come to her father's assistance earlier, but her school-days had stretched into four years of college life, and the girl was nearly twenty-two before she returned to what was practically her home.

Miriam had never fully understood the difficulties and isolation of her father's lot. He had taken care that she should not do so, and had spent his vacations with her in the North; the plea of his own health, and the expense of the journey had been a sufficient excuse for not bringing her South; but when she saw how sorely her help had been needed, she reproached herself with this delay, even while she acknowledged that the destiny before her was almost unendurable.

They had lived a lonely life in Tallawara, these three people, cut off from their kind. No white man had ever stretched out his hand in friendly advance to Mr. Long; no white woman had ever come forward in kindly courtesy to greet either Miss Simmons or Miss Edwards; they had not even speaking acquaintances on the street. The feeling in regard to them ranged from cold disapproval to vindictive dislike; and perhaps the saddest thing of all was that in the long years each of them in a different way had become inured to it.

Gently, sweetly, without bitterness or regret, Mr. Long had acquiesced. Miss Simmons had at last persuaded herself that in her work for the blacks she found entire compensation for the loss of other companionship; and Miss Edwards had become fiercely defiant, vaunting a preference for the simplicity and courtesy of the negroes as contrasted with the self-satisfaction and rudeness she encountered elsewhere.

And into this unnatural circle—fresh from the cool,

hard sunshine of a Northern town, fresh from the stimulating atmosphere of college life, fresh from a happy round of study and work where she had been a leader among her fellows and admired and beloved by her superiors—Miriam Long had come to walk on the sultry streets of Tallawara, where the lounging men blocked her pathway with stony, contemptuous indifference, and the young girls drew away their skirts as she passed, as if to avoid contamination. It was a revelation; and when, by either accident or design, Miss Locke had at last crossed her pathway, the lonely girl had shaken her head, doubtful as to her right to accept any friendship, however cordially offered.

"Are you sure that you know just what you are doing?" she had asked Miss Locke, when invited to come to her house. "We are Pariahs—you will cut yourself off."

"I have no fears," said Miss Locke, confidently. "Tallawara cannot do without me. I may not be the salt, but I am the pepper of its daily food—spiritual food, of course—and pepper in this climate is necessary."

So Miriam had come, and Trenholm, lounging in one warm afternoon in the spring, had found her, with an only half-concealed surprise that had sent her away hurt, and regretful that she had been persuaded to place herself in a position where she could be so wounded.

"You can't do that," he said to Miss Locke, when the gate had clicked behind the girl's retreating figure.

"I should have done it," said Miss Locke, resentfully, "if you had not come and spoiled everything! I am not going to force her upon other people, and if I

choose to make her life a little more tolerable, you have no right to interfere."

Trenholm reflected a moment, then: "She is charming!" he said. "Do you think I hurt her feelings? You might have warned me. Another time I should be glad——"

"Thank you!" said Miss Locke, dryly. "Your effort at help would probably do more harm than good; besides, she is really not so charming as Zoë Mason, or Nellie Lou Burbanks, or half a dozen others that I could name off-hand. She behaves like a nice, healthy boy, and she would be just about as interesting to you as Nellie Lou Burbanks's brother Tom."

But she reckoned without her host; and to her extreme displeasure Trenholm continued to meet Miriam frequently. He was very careful; and Tallawara in general was unaware of his interest. Their first meeting had been in March, when he had been driven South by the unpleasant consequences of an attack of grippe; he had gone away again early in May; but in October he was ordered South for the winter, and when he appeared in Tallawara he found Miriam on the point of leaving with her father to spend a month at the seashore. Trenholm, who was not accustomed to deny himself, had followed them to Ocean Bay, taking elaborate precautions to throw his fellow-citizens off the scent, as a salve to his conscience. He had no false modesty in regard to his position in Tallawara. He was the most marked man there, the man whose sayings and doings were in everybody's mouth. He knew, too, that in regard to women his own reputation and the reputations of the men of his family were not of the

best; but the consciousness of this never interfered with his enjoyment, because, so far as women were concerned, he was really very modest; he had no scars of his own from ancient wounds, and it was more comfortable to believe that others probably enjoyed the same immunity. Real harm, in fact, he assured himself he had never done any woman; and this, in a measure, was true, for the coarser sins and predilections of Tallawara had no allurement for him; but his inherited temperament made amusement of a keener description than was afforded by the ordinary run of life necessary to him, and this amusement, unconsciously to himself, had, in the lapse of years, changed its character. The mimic love-making that he had enjoyed in youth was a harmless pastime compared with the new play which Trenholm called a study of character; for where the old game touched the surface, the new one grasped at the soul. It was a light grasp; Trenholm was not heavy-handed in anything; and until his quarry attempted to escape, the strength of his grip was never apparent.

That afternoon when dinner was over Miriam put away her books, and with her pad and easel walked a short way from the house to finish a sketch. She did not stir when she heard a light step behind her, for by this time she was used to the friendly supervision of the negroes in all she did; but when the looker-on did not speak, the color began to surge slowly into the white skin of her neck—Trenholm's hunter's tread was almost as light as a woman's.

"Do you mind if I stop a minute?" Miriam felt a shock of disappointment at hearing a woman's voice.

It was Helen Thurston who had come up so softly, and without waiting for the permission she had asked to be granted, she seated herself on the trunk of a fallen tree, and prepared to watch the progress of the water-color. "Where have you studied?" she asked.

"I am afraid I have never studied at all," said Miriam. "Abbot has helped me, and Swan and Devol, in the summer vacations that my father and I have spent together at the seashore."

"I know Abbot and Swan well," said Helen; "and I have met Devol, but I can't endure his work!"

"You paint? How delight—" but Miriam stopped. "I am Miriam Long," she said, quickly. "I am teaching for my father in the Negro Mission."

"Oh, yes, I knew you," said Helen. "Tallawara is much too small for you to escape observation. I am Mrs. Thurston, and I am sorry to say that I don't really paint, but I know enough to see that you do."

To be treated with entire unconsciousness of the disadvantages and unpleasantnesses of her position was almost intoxicating. To Miriam it was as if a door had been opened to her, opened through ignorance, no doubt, and at any moment it might close; but so long as it stood ajar she meant to sit in the sunlight that shone through the crack and dream that she was free to enter.

"We are at Mrs. Bruce's," said Helen when she left. "You know where she lives; be sure you come and see me." But Miriam only smiled.

Helen returned home full of interest. "I met such a charming girl when I was out this afternoon; I asked her to come here," she said to Thurston that evening.

"I am sure you will like her. Her father is the old gentleman who teaches at the Mission."

Thurston raised his head quickly. "You asked her to call? I am sorry for that; it may be embarrassing. They are good people over there, and mean well, but affiliation with them is extremely difficult; in fact, impossible. You will find that you must be more careful; if Miss Long met any of the Tallawara people here she would be treated to a rebuff bordering on cruelty."

"She is one of the few interesting persons I have seen since I came."

Thurston shook his head. "I think you had better not pursue the acquaintance."

The warning amounted to a tacit prohibition, and Helen saw in it an irritating subservience to circumstances. "It seems impossible to me, Philip, that you should be so cruelly influenced by local prejudice!"

Thurston looked pained. "It is not cruelty, nor prejudice; but we are going to live here, and we can't run counter to public opinion. I should not suffer from it as you would; a woman must not set herself in opposition to the convictions of everybody around her. If Miss Long comes to see you here at Mrs. Bruce's, the whole community will be talking. Why don't you make friends with some of the women of the place?"

"I have. Zoë Mason is here every day; but this girl needs me more."

"It is more serious than you think. If Miss Long were to come here as much as Zoë does, I shouldn't be surprised if Mrs. Bruce should ask us to leave."

"I wish she would!" cried Helen, passionately. "Indeed, I wish she would!"

"What do you mean?"

"I mean that I can't make myself contented. I can't order my days in conformity with the sordid, communal incompleteness of boarding-house life. There is neither dignity nor peace in passing one's time among outsiders; we are subjected to gossiping supervision from morning until night; we can never be ourselves; it is ruining our every chance of happiness!"

Thurston made no answer. He rose and paced slowly up and down the room.

"I had made up my mind not to speak of it again," said Helen; "but why can't we leave? If it is the trouble you dread, I will do the whole thing alone—make all the arrangements, put in the furniture, rent the house. You needn't even know where it is; all I shall ask of you is to move in with your books when I am ready for you."

"But—" said Thurston.

"Oh, don't object! Here you are, like a cat in a strange garret, shaken out of all your habits; we shall neither of us know what it is to be happy until we have a place of our own."

"Where can we get a place of our own? Do you wish to buy a house?"

"I could rent one; rent here is a trifle. If we went to housekeeping we should not even be put to greater expense than we are at here."

Thurston stood still in his walk and looked at her. "I am very short in regard to money," he said. His tone was embarrassed. "And, in the uncertain state of affairs at the college, it would be unwise to intrench upon what I have saved."

"You feel that your future is insecure? And—money? You have only worried about money?—Is that all?—Philip!"

Thurston recommenced his steady tramp from one end of the room to the other; he could not bear the relief of her tone. "Only money! is that all?" "It is not all!" he cried to himself, passionately. "It is not all, and she should have known it!"

"Philip!" She took a step or two at his side, trying to link her hand in his arm, but he appeared unconscious of her effort, and she sat down again. "I have been saving money for this very purpose, and in the end we should be gaining—financially, as well as otherwise," she said, and her eyes followed him wistfully. "I am not thinking of myself alone," she added.

Thurston was undecided; again he came to a halt.

"It is so horrid here!" she sighed.

The very childishness of the appeal won Thurston; he was willing to grant where he would not receive; he stopped and kissed her on the forehead. "Very well," he said, "do as you choose. It will amuse you and serve to occupy your mind."

Helen made a wry face over the paternal manner of this concession; but it was their last cast for independence and happiness. "I shall tell you nothing until everything is ready. It will be a surprise; if people ask questions, let them think you know all about it," she said, with an effort at cheerful anticipation.

"By the way," said Thurston, suddenly. "Be sure you don't rent that house of Yarnell's."

"What house?"

"Don't take anything that belongs to him; but this

house is beyond the Branch. He tried to rent a house to me not long ago—tried, in fact, to deceive me. They had had diphtheria in it."

"It would be hard to find a place where they hadn't."

"I know; you had better consult Dr. Cross about any house you take."

"Do you really mean that I can do it all without telling you?"

"But I thought that was what you wanted to do!" Thurston spoke a little impatiently, and turned to his writing.

Helen sat and watched him a while; she wondered if men were always so indifferent.

VIII

THE HOUSE ABOVE THE BRANCH

THE next day Helen took Mrs. Bruce into her confidence. They needed more room; it was inconvenient for Mr. Thurston not to be near his books, and so they had decided to go to housekeeping. "Do you know of a pleasant house that we could rent?" she asked. "I should prefer a place with a view."

To Mrs. Bruce, sweet soul, it seemed altogether natural that the "young people," as she slyly called Helen and Thurston, should wish to be by themselves. "I've been sort of counting on your leaving me, Mis' Thurston," she said, with a pathetic dignity in her effort to conceal her disappointment at not retaining them longer, "and I reckon there are two or three houses in town that you could make mighty comfortable. There's one that—that is in charge of my brother-in-law, Professor Yarnell."

"Mr. Yarnell offered that one to Mr. Thurston, but Mr. Thurston objects to it. They had diphtheria there."

"James Yarnell owns several houses. Are you sure the Professor knew the one he meant?"

"Yes," said Helen, "it is on the other side of the Branch—the railroad down by the station; but there is another one, a beautiful place, above that little brook

on the street that leads past the Fair Grounds. It is all covered with vines, and stands quite high, in the midst of a large garden. Do you remember?"

"That is the Billings house," said Mrs. Bruce, looking embarrassed; for the "little brook" that Helen mentioned was known in Tallawara as "The Branch."

"It is charming," said Helen. "People could hardly help being happy there; don't you think so?"

"It is better built and more convenient than any house in town," said Mrs. Bruce, evasively, "and the woodwork in the parlor is sure-enough elegant."

"And is it healthy? Did they have diphtheria there last winter?"

"They had it in September — young Sam Billings brought it home from school; there's nothing wrong about the house. Sam's mother and the baby took it from him."

"Did they get well?"

"No; they died."

Helen hesitated. "I like that house; I have thought of renting it every time I have passed it. I wonder if it would be safe? Where does Mr. Billings live?"

"It don't belong to Mr. Billings," said Mrs. Bruce; "and as for its being unhealthy you might ask the doctor, and of course you'll consult Mr. Thurston."

"No, I am not going to trouble Mr. Thurston. I intend to have everything done and in order before he even sees it."

"But Mrs. Thurston! What if the Professor shouldn't like it? I don't believe the—parties—who own that house would rent it to you without the Professor's approval."

" He is sure to approve. Couldn't you ask "—a little gleam of humor came into Helen's eyes, for she had suddenly made up her mind that the house belonged to Mrs. Bruce—" the ' parties ' that own it if they could let me have the keys? "

" Well, I'll ask for them, but I can't promise you'll get them; " and Mrs. Bruce went away shaking her head.

She was in a quandary. Although Yarnell had obtained control of it, and occasionally claimed it as his, the Billings house was really her own property; but she dared not offer it to Helen without Yarnell's knowledge, and, as soon as she could leave the duties of her household, she ran to her sister's and laid the proposition before him. " I didn't know, James," she said, looking at him nervously, " but that you'd made up your mind to let me have my old place back again. Of course I couldn't consent to swappin' it off for that house down by the Prestonpans Railroad, like you proposed to do in the spring. I asked Dr. Cross about it, and he said that the Billings place was worth twice as much as yours."

" I don't see why you need bring Cross into a family arrangement like that," snapped Yarnell.

" Dr. Cross said he was surprised at you for making such a proposal."

" I'd like to know," said Mrs. Yarnell, plaintively, " what business Dr. Cross has to be surprised at James? "

" And since I never made any such proposal," said Yarnell, " perhaps you'll tell him that his surprise is thrown away."

"Was it the Billings house you offered to Professor Thurston, James? Or was it the house by the railroad?"

"I offered my own house to Professor Thurston—or, at least, what I considered my own house," said Yarnell.

"But what house did you think was yours, James? I don't know what to do. If Mrs. Thurston wants the Billings house, shall I rent it to them? Can I rent it to them?" she spoke eagerly.

"It would have to have a lot of repairs," said Yarnell.

Mrs. Bruce looked worried.

"I shouldn't wonder if it took four or five hundred dollars," added Yarnell, speculatively. "I suppose I could lend it to you; you might give me another mortgage on the Billings place."

"That's just the way it was before, James. The first mortgage on the Billings place was only for two hundred dollars; and yet, somehow, it mounted up and mounted up until, in spite of my always seeming to be paying it, I never could get it clear. I don't want to say anything against the law, but I never could make out how I came to lose my own house that was worth as much as fifteen hundred dollars, and never get no more for it than just two! I said those very words to Dr. Cross, and he said perhaps *you'd* explain it to me."

Yarnell gave her a startled glance. "You never did lose your own house," he said, angrily. "It's been your house from the very beginning, and it's your house now; and if you hadn't been such a fool you would have known it."

"You've had all the rent from it, James, for the last six years!"

"Well, you owed me a heap more than that, but I am willing to say that it squares us, just to get rid of having any more dealings with you. It doesn't look very well for you to be going about making a fuss like this when you've got twice as much property as Clara!"

"But, then, that property came to me through Mr. Bruce. I don't believe anybody would think I ought to divide with Clara!" cried poor Mrs. Bruce, whom Yarnell, by this time, had succeeded in puzzling to such a degree that she was not sure that she ought to own anything.

"What made you go and tell Cross?" Yarnell demanded, suddenly.

Mrs. Bruce's face flushed deep crimson. "I didn't feel quite sure of my own judgment," she said, "and so I started to ask Professor Thurston what he thought, one day; but he told me he'd much rather I'd consult Dr. Cross about my business affairs."

"Indeed!" said Yarnell. "How mighty considerate and high-minded the Professor seems to be!" There was a rancor in his voice that made the two women look at him in surprise. He was filled with rage and disappointment at the prospect of losing his hold on his sister-in-law's property, but he had a wise dread of provoking investigation, and the vision of Dr. Cross in the background had caused him to beat a swift retreat. Moreover, the President had made no secret of the manner in which Yarnell had offered the Billings house to Thurston, and this was causing much

unfavorable comment in the community. Yarnell was especially tenacious of his good repute at this critical stage of affairs in the college, and he saw at once that if Thurston could be induced, after all, to rent the Billings place from Mrs. Bruce, it would go far toward putting an end to both sets of gossip.

"Well," he said, roughly, "do you mean to rent them the Billings place or don't you? If you're going to take your business into your own hands, you've got to make up your own mind hereafter."

"Are you sure, James, that there is no objection to my going ahead and letting her take it? What house *was* it that you offered the Professor? She says she's not going to say a word to her husband about it until it's done. She wants to surprise him."

"I don't see how she can have the self-confidence to do it," said Mrs. Yarnell. "There's something mighty unfeminine about her feeling that she can decide everything for herself and arrange all the rooms before he sees them."

"Do you mean to say," said Yarnell, "that she doesn't intend to let him know a thing until she's moved in, bag and baggage, and that he's going to allow her to do it? What security have you that Thurston may not back out when he comes to hear of it, and leave the whole thing on your hands again?"

"It doesn't seem to me, James, that that is exactly like the Professor," said Mrs. Yarnell. "He's not very good at a bargain, even if he is a Yankee."

"And, besides, he's a gentleman, too—he's lived down here so long; and unless the Billings house is the one you've offered him already there's no reason why I

shouldn't go on and let Mrs. Thurston have it," repeated Mrs. Bruce, with something of the persistence of a teasing child.

"Let her have it—let her have it," mimicked Yarnell. "Oh, yes, let her have it by all means, if you can get her to take it; but, remember, you're not to bring me into the transaction. I wash my hands of the whole thing. I know nothing about it! If you borrow money of me, you're not to say what you borrow it for, and I don't want to know how you spend it. When you're dealing with a man like Thurston you've got to put yourself above all suspicion."

Mrs. Bruce's feet carried her home again as if winged. She would now be able to put the Billings house in order, as she had long wished; and she had it in her own hands again, an outward and visible sign that, as owner of one of the handsomest places in the village, she belonged to the aristocracy of Tallawara.

Upon one point she was firm. Helen was not allowed even to inspect it until it had received thorough disinfecting and fumigation; and when Dr. Cross assured her that, after certain sanitary improvements, the place being situated on a hill, would be safer even than the houses in town, she heard him with confidence and signed a lease without hesitation.

Contrary to precedent, the work went on rapidly. Helen's energy seemed to galvanize the leisurely colored workmen into feverish activity; and the whole town, in a ferment of delight, banded together to preserve Thurston's ignorance of her proceedings, for in a quiet way, Yarnell had skilfully managed to have all

Tallawara interested in abetting the scheme; and the President, the only person who would have considered it his duty to interfere, was away on college business.

The day came when, with the exception of Thurston's books, the new home was finally in readiness for occupation; gifts from these friendly, cordial people poured in ceaselessly from morning until evening. The house was filled with flowers from top to bottom, and enough rich cake loaded the shelves of the pantry to supply a boarding-school for weeks. Helen and Thurston left Mrs. Bruce's in a heavy fall of rain that made it necessary to send for one of the village hacks; as they stepped in, Helen laughed and pulled down the curtains. It was after six o'clock, and the evening was dark; Thurston had but the vaguest impression of the direction they were following.

"This is our real home-coming," said Helen, taking his hand shyly in the dark. Thurston remembered with a pang that other home-coming which had found her so coldly unresponsive, and tried not to be ungenerous. The carriage rolled on through the sodden streets; he was conscious of ascending a hill and stopping before a well-lighted, cheerful house. They crossed a wide porch in a pour of rain.

"Do you feel as if you were in Tallawara?" said Helen, turning upon him as they closed the door.

Thurston looked about; the unexpected charm of his surroundings was almost painful. Soft rugs, harmonious colors, tempered lights, an open wood fire, and all the quaint and valuable possessions of her father's house lent the place a home-like familiarity, a

sweetness, a refinement, that brought sudden tears to his eyes. It was this, then, that had been wanting; this that she had missed; and yet, it was something that he never could have supplied. She had been driven to provide it for them both, and he—he, selfish brute, would have gone on unheeding. Now, through her intuition, life would run on again as it should! All the small and jealous vexation which momentarily had assailed him vanished in a flood of tenderness. "Have you done all this for me?" he cried. "How you must have worked!"

"Everyone has helped. It has brought me into friendly contact with the whole town. They are so warm-hearted, so kind, so generous! They have made Tallawara feel like home."

"Haven't I been here before? Where did you find a house like this?"

"Do not ask—wait until morning. Let us detach to-night from the rest of our lives and pretend that it is a new world."

Thurston made no further question as to the locality. He abandoned himself almost childishly to her desire for mystery, and looked forward with pleasure to finding that all this new completeness had been built up in the midst of his every-day surroundings. He was very happy and perfectly sanguine that the mistakes and misunderstandings of the last six months had come to an end forever.

The next morning, when the sun shone through the curtains, he rose and looked out. From that point of view the landscape was unfamiliar, but the spire of

the little colored church began to undeceive him. He crossed the hall to the other side of the house, and stood in a small bay-window that faced the west. The village was below him; the ground from his property sloped to the brook; he could not see it, but its border of thick Cherokee rose betrayed its whereabouts. The tall tank of the village water-works, the dome of the court-house, the tower of the gray stone church, and the belfry of the white frame school-house all lay before him. There was but one house in town that commanded that outlook—the Billings place!

What was he to do? He was convinced that his wife had been tricked, that he himself had been made a dupe and fool. More than this, he felt that their surroundings were fraught with most horrible danger. He sprang back to Helen's room.

"Do you know where we are—do you know about this house?" he said.

She looked up at him sleepily. "It is all right; it has been completely disinfected, repapered, and I can't tell you what else. Dr. Cross oversaw everything, and says that we are safer here than we should be in the village."

Thurston was silent. He knew that Dr. Cross would not have permitted Helen to run any risks, and yet while the sense of having been duped pressed upon him with intolerable keenness, at every point an expression of his just rage was frustrated by the fear of spoiling his wife's manifest pleasure in making these arrangements.

"Mrs. Bruce has been extremely generous," added Helen.

"Mrs. Bruce?"

"Yes. Didn't you know this was her house? It simplified our leaving her. No one could say we were not satisfied, or that we had behaved unfairly. Do you see?"

Thurston saw. There was not a break in the network with which Yarnell had encompassed him. He had no tangible grievance, and the ridicule of the whole town would follow any attempt to break Helen's contract. He decided, at once, that she was not to be told. For this outcome he was himself to blame, because, in the mortification of his poverty, he had withdrawn entirely from any scheme where he could not bear at least an equal part of the expense. He remembered the hot sensation of shame he had felt when he gave his consent to Helen's carrying out her plans alone; he could not endure the thought of seeing her provide that which his pride demanded should have been paid for by himself.

Absent-minded and silent he ate his breakfast, and listlessly set about arranging and classifying his books. The charm of their first day in their new home was broken.

IX

PENUMBRA

FOR nearly a week there had been a flutter of interest in the dove-cote at the Mission. Wild horses would not have dragged from Miss Edwards or Miss Simmons the acknowledgment that a life of unselfish endeavor for the good of others could be deficient in entertaining incident; but when the advent of the Thurstons provided a legitimate subject for neighborly comment at their very door, they had joyfully and unaffectedly taken advantage of the occasion. Even Miriam found herself listening hungrily to this "back-door information," as she called it, coming as it did through Ailsa, the laundress, whom Helen had engaged as cook. The half-unconscious toss of the head, and the ready excuse to leave the room, which had hitherto greeted the budget of gossip that the good ladies brought home from their daily walks, was omitted, and the defiant uplifting of the youthful chin became almost imperceptible. Helen's chairs and tables, her antique rugs and oriental hangings, even her paper and her paint, could be heard of without degradation. Miriam knew her; she might any day walk in and see all these things wholesomely, naturally, whereas the day before an account of Mrs. General Bill Mason's thriftlessness in regard to the mending of carpets, and

speculations as to the genuineness of Zoë's brilliant complexion had filled the girl with anger and disgust. "What are the Masons to us?" she had protested.

"But, Miriam," Miss Simmons insisted, "I saw that carpet out on the line when Hannibal was beating it three months ago, and that same hole was near the corner,—just as if it had been in front of a door, you know," addressing Miss Edwards. "They probably have tripped on it every day since."

"Perhaps they put a mat over it," suggested Miss Edwards.

"Of course they do! And then they wonder why the negroes are so shiftless. How can the negroes be anything else, with such examples?"

"Yes; and when I saw that Miss Zoë down street this morning, I did not wonder that Mrs. Mason's maid —Phœbe, you know—came into Ailsa's cabin the other day and begged for powder. "Powdeh!" said Ailsa. "I ain't got no powdeh! But dere's plenty of sut up de chimbley, if dat'd do you!"

"If it were only powder!" said Miss Simmons; and then, shielding her mouth from Miriam's eyes, she had made in dumb show the word "*Paint!*" with careful articulation, as if she had been speaking to a deaf-mute.

"Oh, oh! she doesn't paint any more than I do! How can you be so unkind?" Miriam had cried, and fled raging from the room; this interest in the affairs of a community that openly despised and ostracized them seemed an incredible humiliation.

"I wish I could get a message to Ailsa about those things for Mary Lou Winter's baby," said Miss Sim-

mons one morning after breakfast. "She's put them away somewhere in her cabin, and I don't know where they are. Mary Lou's brother is going by here at noon, and I wanted to send them out to her. It's the only chance I shall have for a week."

"Give me the message," said Miriam; "I will take it to her."

"I think I had better write a note," said Miss Simmons, doubtfully. "Hannibal will be going up, and he'll take it for me; he wants to see Ailsa, anyhow."

"I am sorry," said Mr. Long, "but I must send Hannibal to Prestonpans as soon as we are done breakfast. He will not be back before evening."

"It is only a step to the Thurstons," said Miriam.

The three looked at her, puzzled and perturbed. "You might leave word and then go on," suggested Miss Simmons.

Miriam flushed. "I am going to call upon Mrs. Thurston."

"I hardly think that is necessary," said Miss Edwards, hastily.

"Not necessary, but agreeable. She invited me."

"That was when she first came," said Miss Simmons, gently; "she may have learned to feel differently. You did not accept the invitation then; why should you now?"

"Because she is in her own house, and not boarding with Mrs. Bruce."

"Daughter," said Mr. Long, reluctantly, "I fear that it would be unwise, and perhaps ungenerous, to take advantage of that invitation. Mrs. Thurston probably gave it in ignorance; she cannot have any

real understanding of the situation, and a friendship with you might entail upon her many things that were disagreeable."

"But, father, I am sure that she understands. I met her only day before yesterday at her gate, and she repeated the invitation cordially."

"That was kind of her." The old man's face lighted up. "Very kind, but, I am afraid, a little quixotic. She has been here only a month or so; she cannot know what she is doing. Besides"—with a little smile upon the other two ladies—"we have our own little circle here of congenial friends; why should we enlarge it?" Miriam looked at him in the dumb helplessness which women so often feel at the curious limitation of the masculine capacity for sympathy.

"Yes, we are very happy as we are," continued Mr. Long, in kindly complacence; "and it is most fortunate that we find each other so sufficient to our needs. Even were they more cordially disposed toward us, I greatly fear that with the advantages which we have had, we should find, in any extended intercourse with the society of Tallawara, but little that could interest or improve, accustomed as we are to broader cultivation and higher standards of education. Not that we have not dropped behind, ourselves," the old gentleman pursued, reflectively. "I felt it acutely before Miriam came; I sometimes feared that she would find us very backward, and that our quiet family life would seem very dull and uninteresting. But I do not think it does; I do not think it does."

"Well, if she finds it dull," said Miss Simmons, generously, "she is very sweet about hiding it. And I

don't think that college life has spoiled her a bit; not a bit!"

Miss Edwards looked at Miriam speculatively; and not divining that the gaze was sympathetic, instead of critical, Miriam returned the glance with defiance. When she rose from the breakfast-table she followed her father into his study.

"Father," she said, abruptly. "Mr. Thurston is a Northern man, a generous-minded, liberal man. Why can't you go there with me to call?"

Mr. Long did not answer at once. He turned toward the window, and seemed to take the proposition into consideration. "It is too late," he said, at last, wistfully. "When he first came here, Mr. Thurston made some advances; but the state of feeling was so much more bitter then than now that I felt it my duty not to return them. It caused some discussion among the authorities in the North; they felt that I might be losing a valuable auxiliary; and I myself have always regretted the necessity that deprived me of the Professor's society."

But Miriam could not renounce the pleasant prospect of Helen's friendship.

"Tallawara has changed—you say so, yourself," she argued. "You might do now what ten years ago was impossible, and we both need something better than the society of two sentimental, elderly spinsters!"

"My dear! My dear!" remonstrated Mr. Long, anxiously. "Miss Simmons and Miss Edwards are highly accomplished and elegant ladies; surely you find them congenial?"

The girl flashed a glance at him full of amusement,

and also a little pity. "They are very congenial—to each other."

Mr. Long yielded the point. "Since you so covet this new friendship, go yourself and see this young lady; I withdraw my opposition. Perhaps, after all, it will be better, even if you should find hurt where you look for solace; it is one of those lessons of life which each must con for himself. For me—it is too late to take up fresh interests. I have you; that is enough."

Miriam left the room, and the old man looked after her, sighing. "Yes," he said, "we have them, and we are satisfied; they have us, but we are not enough. If I were taken from her, Miriam's life would go on without me, and sorrow for my loss would only deepen and improve her nature. But if this my one child were taken from me, in losing her I should lose my all, and life would narrow and narrow to the end,—the lonely end!"

So Miriam, a few minutes later, walked down the road toward the village and opened the Thurston's gate with all the defiant bearing conferred by a disapproving conscience. Ailsa came to the door, and after delivering Miss Simmons's message, Miriam asked for Helen, and was shown into the drawing-room, her head erect and her eyes flashing.

It was almost like a dash of cold water to discover Miss Locke sitting in front of the open fire. "How do you do?" said that lady, and there was an acid undercurrent of inquiry in her tone that included more than health.

Miriam flushed. "Isn't Mrs. Thurston at home?"

she asked, looking about the room in embarrassment. "I came to give a message from Miss Simmons to Ailsa about some clothes."

"Mrs. Thurston has gone to her husband's study to find me a book that we were talking of," said Miss Locke; "but if you are in a hurry, I can deliver any message you wish."

Tears rushed to the girl's eyes, but anger burned them away. "I gave my message to Ailsa at the door," she said, suddenly recovering her dignity, "and I will wait with you until Mrs. Thurston comes back."

Miss Locke was not a cruel woman; it was the instinct for fair play that determined her to protect Helen, if possible, from any unpleasant consequences of her own ignorance and Miriam's lack of consideration. Her willingness to risk these consequences for herself made her the more zealous, as she feared lest her own misguided kindness had opened the way for the present complication. She looked very handsome and self-possessed in her well-made cloth gown; and as she sat there in silence, Miriam felt the intentional contrast to her ordinary cordiality; but before long Helen returned with the book, and at the unmistakable pleasure she showed in Miriam's presence, Miss Locke stiffened perceptibly.

"I came early," said Miriam, "partly to give Miss Simmons's message, and partly because I was not needed in school until eleven to-day, and hoped to find no one here."

"Thank you," said Miss Locke.

"You know I did not mean that! But I thought—I felt—that it might be pleasanter if—I mean that——"

Helen's face grew pitiful as she divined the girl's anxiety to avoid meeting the people of the town. "I am glad that Miss Locke is here," she said; "and I am sure Miss Locke is, too."

Miss Locke did not respond. "We had better defer our reading until some other day," she said, coldly.

"You must not think of it!" said Miriam, rising.

"Stay, then, and join us," said Helen, cordially.

Miriam looked imploringly at Miss Locke, but Miss Locke was inexorable. "I must go," she faltered.

Miss Locke suddenly smiled radiantly. "Good-by, my dear," she said to Miriam, benevolently. "Don't forget that day after to-morrow is our day for Montaigne; and come early. Saturday mornings are always too short."

"This is too bad! You have more than an hour left!" protested Helen.

"Don't forget the Montaigne!" said Miss Locke, cheerfully, putting on her eye-glasses and opening her book.

"Thank you, I will come with pleasure. What time do you meet?" Helen spoke with a laugh.

"Our Montaigne class is a close corporation," said Miss Locke, coolly; then, rising, she took Miriam by the shoulders and looked at her steadily; there was compassion as well as challenge in her strong, gray eyes. "Good-by, dear child," she said, giving her a gentle push toward the door.

"We'll set up a sketching class. Miss Long will give me drawing lessons under your windows, Miss Locke, and you shall not be asked to join," said Helen, challenge also, and vexation, too, in her tone.

But Miriam, whose face had grown wan, only smiled and went away. She had found hurt where she hoped for solace; and, as she hurried homeward, she met Trenholm. He hesitated a moment, then smilingly raised his hat and passed on. She had not thought of it before, but Trenholm always passed her on the street with a formal inclination—perhaps Miss Locke had interfered here also! Or could it be that Trenholm was displeased at the frequency with which of late Guthrie Johnson had thrust himself upon her? This man seemed to have an instinctive knowledge of the times when she might be at leisure, and persistently joined her whenever he met her. She was thinking of this with angry rebellion when his voice behind her arrested her steps.

"Ah, Miss Long, I am mighty glad not to miss you!" he said.

But Miriam, as a result of her reflections, bowed to him gravely, and ignoring his outstretched hand, turned aside into the gate of the school-house without giving him time to follow.

The Johnson family exemplified one of those curious cases of heredity, where generation after generation may live in a town, occupy positions of influence, be possessors of wealth and recipients of the same advantages in education, and, apparently, in breeding, as the best people; in short, may pass their days among the best people of the place and yet never be of them. For years Guthrie Johnson had been at endless pains to make himself acceptable to what, with a fatal admission, he called the aristocracy of Tallawara; and now he had set his heart on Miriam Long! He knew that

such a marriage would shatter every hope he had in a social direction, and he now turned back toward the town, his face black with anger and mortification, telling himself, as he stopped at the apothecary's, that the girl was not worth the price he would have to pay for her.

A fire was crackling in the stove in honor of the unusual rawness of the atmosphere, for the day was damp and cold, with one of the first touches of winter.

"Where have you been, Johnson?" said one of the loafers, who was tilting his chair against the counter.

"Oh, out in the country," said Johnson, seating himself on a packing-box.

"Engagin' in mission work?"

Johnson smiled fatuously.

"Made any converts?" asked another.

"Not so many as I would like; but the ones I do make, I tell you, gentlemen, are worth while," said Johnson, who, by one of the inexplicable tricks that only love can play, found all his rancor had suddenly departed. "The day is coming when Tallawara will have a little surprise."

"Oh, no, it won't, Johnson. That little surprise you are preparin' for us is done busted already."

"I'd like to know what you mean."

"We've seen how she treats you. Speaks to you as if you were the dirt under her feet. Before I'd get the mitten from one of those white niggers at the Mission!"

Johnson's veering passion whirled back to resentment. "Look here, fellows, I'm just sick of you all taking it for granted that I can't go out to old Long's

except for making love to that girl of his. I've got business with the old man, I have, and I'd like you all to know it. Do you think I'd demean myself to marry his daughter? I might make myself agreeable —perhaps too agreeable—but as for marrying——"

The words died on Johnson's lips, for Trenholm, who had been standing in front of the shelves with his back to the rest of them, came from behind the counter, very white and cold, and stared at him forbiddingly over the head of the loafer on the other side of the stove. There was a long, uncomfortable silence; then Johnson gave an uneasy little laugh.

"Well, Jim," he said, in a voice somewhat craven, "what's the matter with you? You look kind of sick."

"I am," said Trenholm, "sick and ashamed to see a Southern gentleman conduct himself as you are doing!"

Johnson sprang up angrily. "I'd like to know what business it is of yours," he blustered.

"What right have you to speak so of a lady in a crowd like this?" continued Trenholm. "You wouldn't dare do it if she were a Tallawara woman, and had a brother or a father, or any other relation here to resent it; but this young girl has no one to protect her, and you are not afraid."

Johnson's face grew purple. To do him justice, he was not a coward, physically; his cowardice was the cowardice of craft; he would willingly have fought Trenholm, but he did not dare incur the unpopularity which that fighting would entail.

"Seems to me that the little Long is not without a protector after all," he jeered. "If Jim's going to

enter the lists against me, I might as well throw up my chances."

"You shall not couple my name with that of this young lady. You are perfectly well aware that I have never set my foot in her father's house." Trenholm did not wait for anything more, but strode out of the store in a white heat of anger.

"I have done it now," he thought, as he walked away. "I have probably worked more harm in five minutes than Johnson's foul tongue could compass in a year; for no one believes Johnson, anyhow."

The loafers in the meanwhile were filled with interest and excitement at this most unexpected development.

"How much does Jim know her, anyway?" inquired one of them.

"I bet you he don't know her at all," said another; "just waked up ugly this morning and happened to light on Gus. He wouldn't lie to save his neck; and if he says he's never been to the house, he never has."

"Been to the house!" sneered Johnson. "Mighty little need of his being to the house when he meets the girl at other houses."

"Where in thunder can she go?"

"Go?" said Johnson. "You'll find her at Miss Locke's five days out of the seven; and this morning when I was up there, I heard her father tell Miss Simmons that she'd gone over to Mrs. Thurston's."

There was an ominous silence.

"It's well enough for Miss Locke to take her up," said one of the loafers at last; "she's a woman by herself, and nothing depends on her. But Mrs. Thurston better look out; we all ain't going to have the professors

in our college taking sides against us and teaching our young men a lot of d——d Northern mugwumpery. If Thurston ain't prepared to stand by his own color here, the next best thing he can do is to step down and out; and the sooner the college is removed to the State capital, where matters like this can be looked into, the better."

"There'll be a heap of changes in that removal," said a second listener, "and I guess Thurston'll find a mighty good opportunity to return to his native soil."

This was not at all what Johnson had expected. "Gentlemen," he said, persuasively, "if you move the college away from Tallawara, you do the town and the college an irreparable injury."

"Oh, shut up with your 'irreparable'!" said the last speaker. "If the college is going to be turned into a darkey mission, I say again—the sooner Tallawara's rid of it the better."

X

A STORM

WHEN Trenholm went down to his dinner at Mrs. Bruce's that day at noon his friends there managed to make him feel that he was the object of some very unfavorable criticism. Brinton in particular seemed to have taken the affair at the apothecary's in bad part, and had no hesitation in showing his impatience and disapproval. There had always been something irresponsible about Trenholm that was especially annoying to Brinton, who, when he altered his course of action or changed his mind, did it ponderously, from weighty reasons, feeling that the change was justified by the amount of friction it involved.

Accustomed, as he was, to the smoothly running wheels of an unvarying popularity, Trenholm found himself irritated and annoyed. His mind was completely distracted from his work, and early in the afternoon, when Brinton's disgusted face had obtruded itself between him and his paper a maddening number of times, he threw down his pen, drew on his high boots, and was struggling into his canvas coat when Louis came into the room.

"Wha' you gwine, Mars' Jim?"

"I'm going shooting; I need exercise."

"For de Lawd's sake, what you gwine shoot?"

"Squirrels, if I can't find anything better."

"Might as well leave you' gun at home, den; y'ain't hit nothin' since you came back dis fall."

Trenholm, who was a very good shot, resented this. "I am going, nevertheless," he said.

"Don't believe you' gun's clean."

"I saw you clean it."

"Bet anythin', Mars' Jim, dere's a big hole in you' boots. De las' time you wore dem dey was soakin' wet."

"See here, Louis, what are you driving at? Why don't you want me to go?"

"When folkses quar'l wiv odder folkses," said Louis, oracularly, "folkses better lay low."

"Pooh!" said Trenholm.

"I tell you, Mars' Jim, dey is famblies wha' shootin' runs in de blood. It's in de Johnson blood, strong, and when dey don't shoot from behine de fence, dey gets someone else to do it for 'em."

"You needn't worry," said Trenholm; "I'll keep my eyes open; and you know that I can shoot, even if I haven't hit anything lately."

"Shootin' *men* don't run in you' fambley, Mars' Jim. You'll 'scuse me for mentionin' it, but it's *gittin'* shot dat runs in you' fambley. You' uncle Ben, he done get shot up dere in Va'ginny befo' you was born; an' you' uncle Jim, when he was about you' age, was shot down in de streets of Tallawara—from behin' de fence dat time; an' de nex' time—de nex' time—" Louis half turned away. "Someone done it fo' him," he muttered; "a knife is a heap quieter dan——"

"That is enough," said Trenholm, sharply. "Bring my gun."

Louis brought the gun reluctantly, and Trenholm swung off down through the back of his own property toward the woods. He wanted to rid himself of all thoughts of Miriam Long; the character of her attraction for him filled him with uneasiness. True, she was young, good to look upon, intelligent, and gifted; but there were others even more intelligent, better to look upon, and endowed with greater gifts, who, so far as he was concerned, possessed less charm. Miriam drew him without any assigned reason, and he acknowledged that it was a dangerous state of affairs—for himself. Miriam's own risks, as yet, seemed unimportant. Two years ago he had felt almost this same attraction in another direction; but it had been easier to run away—everything of that kind was easier in the North!—he reflected, ungraciously. Then, too, it had been a mere touch-and-go; it would be rather interesting now to know whether the other person——

He had been crashing noisily through a tangle of Jackson vine and creeper, and had come to the edge of a little ravine, cut precipitously in the soft red clay; on the other side, half-way down, stood Helen Thurston, her back to the bank, where she had stopped, frightened at the noise he made.

"How do you do, Mrs. Thurston?" he called. "Is the Professor back there in the woods?"

"No," she answered, "I am alone."

Trenholm stood still a moment, looking across at

her incredulously. "May I come over and join you? I should be glad to walk home with you."

"But I do not wish to return."

Without saying anything more Trenholm plunged down, waded the little stream at the bottom of the ravine, and in a few steps was at her side. "You were surely not thinking of going on alone?"

"It seemed to-day as if this continual turning backward had reached a point not to be endured, but I confess that I was relieved when I saw you come crashing through the brush just now."

"For a cautious person you do take the most incredible risks!"

"Risks are wholesome necessities."

"You must let me come with you. We can go through to the other side of the wood, and get back to Tallawara by the road."

There was an undercurrent of excitement in the meeting, and they tramped on together, tearing their way through the hanging trailing vines, careless of swampy ground or impeding brush. At last, warned by the glow of the sunset, Trenholm unwillingly took a short cut to the main road, and they turned their faces homeward. Helen had appeared at the moment when his half-framed query was still on his lips; he did not wish to cut the time too short lest he should lose all hope of an answer. As for Helen, three days of sullen quiet on Thurston's part had convinced her that her plan of changing the gray of their lives into a cheerful rose had failed. She had come out filled with bitter disappointment and revolt at fate. The life she was leading was not to be endured! Tren-

holm's knowledge of her unhappiness had become a bond of union instead of the cause of alienation, and she also started on the homeward road with regret.

"Ever since you first entered on this wild experiment which was to remove you from Mrs. Bruce and us, and bestow you entirely on Thurston and domesticity, it has been impossible to catch a glimpse of you," complained Trenholm. "It was a bad, selfish plan; I hope it is going to fail."

The startled glance she gave him would have escaped any eye but Trenholm's, so quick was she to deny its meaning. "You may come in to dinner tonight, and see if it has failed."

"Dinner! Ye gods, she dines! How long do you expect to keep this up?"

"As long as I wish."

"As long as the colored mammy who cooks for you wishes, would be nearer the mark. And so I am forgiven?" He dropped the question carelessly.

"Better than that,—your sin is forgotten."

"It is not like you to forget anything; and you must acknowledge that I saw clearly. I grant you I had no right to see at all! But the newness, the strangeness, and the—terror of this country were driving you to despair."

"And that was all your meaning?"

"It is all my meaning now; will not that do as well?"

Helen laughed.

"And are we friends?" said Trenholm, eagerly.

She turned toward him one questioning, hesitating moment; then she frankly gave him her hand. It was

a relief, she thought, to be understood by at least one of her fellow-creatures.

"Enjoying a lovers' stroll in the twilight?" called a voice, coarsely and mockingly.

They had been too much absorbed to notice a man who was driving on the road behind them until he was close upon them.

Trenholm sprang aside, taking Helen with him out of the way of the horse's hoofs.

"Oh, I beg pardon"—the voice in the buggy was carried along with the moving of the horse—"I thought it was someone else."

The horse climbed the hill toward the village with tired, soft thuds of the feet, and the body of the buggy creaked in a sort of rhythmical answer. Helen watched it, unconscious of the annoyance that showed in her face.

"When you have been here a little longer," said Trenholm, quietly, "you will learn that teasing of that kind is the small coin of Tallawara conversation; it takes the place of the weather in the North—you have a heap more weather than love-making up there, you know!"

Helen quickened her steps, for the night had shut down suddenly, and they had reached the village street. The "Boston Store," the "New York Bargain Store," and the "Racket Store" were all vying with each other in the glaring colors of their show windows and the enormous size of their flaring kerosene lamps. Scattered in between them the little grog-shops were filled with either lounging negroes or indolent white men—never with both.

All the doors stood open, and Helen, picking her way carefully through the mud, was not conscious of the many heads that turned to watch them as they passed; but Trenholm saw; his brow darkened, and he hurried her almost breathlessly along until they turned the corner into the more quiet street that led toward home.

"I must go down to my house first," said Trenholm, when they reached the Thurstons' gate.

Glad of the opportunity to make some slight additional arrangements, Helen entered the house, but Thurston's brow clouded when he heard of the expected guest. He had almost decided to tell her of the shock he had had on finding the trick which Yarnell had played upon them, and to explain frankly all the worries and complications of the last few weeks; but the presence of a stranger would make this impossible.

"It seems to me that Trenholm would have displayed more tact if he had declined your invitation, when he knows how few opportunities we have had of seeing each other since we came to Tallawara," he said, fretfully, while they were waiting for Trenholm's tardy appearance.

"We shall see quite as much of each other when he is present as we do in his absence—and, very likely, we shall talk more!" said Helen, unable to refrain from this gibe at the nine silent meals of the last three days.

Thurston looked honestly puzzled; his thoughts had been so loud that he was quite unconscious that they had not been vocal, but Trenholm was already at the door, and they went out to dinner immediately.

A tall, handsome colored woman was standing behind Helen's chair when they entered the dining-room. Trenholm started slightly when he saw her, and Helen noticed that the woman nodded back at him with a smile half defiant, half familiar.

"So you have Ailsa," he said, as the waitress left the room a moment.

"She is the 'colored mammy' you spoke of, who cooks for me. Do you know her?" said Helen.

"Of course I know her! She belonged to my mother, and was born on our place."

"Is she so old as that?"

"Her mother was one of the servants my mother brought with her at the time of her marriage. Dulcie was my mother's maid, and Ailsa—Ailsa is about six months younger than I am—not very old after all!"

Ailsa had come back, and the subject dropped; but Helen noticed that as she passed about the table Trenholm looked at her from time to time with an odd, nervous, almost apprehensive glance.

"This is really a tropical country," said Helen, suddenly. "Those canes in the woods looked like bamboo, and I saw an enormous cactus at the edge of the road as we turned home. I was going to ask you about it when that disagreeable man—" she stopped.

"What disagreeable man?" said Thurston.

"Gus Johnson," said Trenholm, quickly; "we had a quarrel this morning down at the drug-store, and he took the first opportunity that offered to make himself unpleasant."

A faint flush rose to Helen's face. Thurston still looked inquiringly.

"About once in so often," said Trenholm, easily, "the Johnsons need suppression. I found myself compelled to administer a preliminary dose this morning; it is a sort of hereditary obligation. It began as far back as my grandfather's time, and my father gave the Johnsons, both father and son, a dose that has not been forgotten.—Look out, Ailsa, you are going to spill that sauce on Mrs. Thurston." He spoke sharply; Ailsa started, deftly caught the slipping dish, muttering something under her breath that Helen took for an apology.

"Never mind," she said, "no harm is done"; but a deep, angry flush rose and glowed under the brown of Ailsa's swarthy cheek, her eyes shone and glittered as she passed to and fro about her duties.

"A curious family, those Johnsons," said Thurston. "You were not here at the time of Johnson's failure, were you, Trenholm? He lost all he had in one morning, speculating in cotton futures; he bought at twelve, and went home to dinner thinking himself made for life; then, when he went up-town at one, he found himself a beggar."

"I remember," said Trenholm, absently, "he had some trouble with his church in consequence; they wanted to expel him."

"They didn't carry it out; more than half the elders speculate in cotton futures themselves, and they felt pretty sore about it at that time; nobody lost his place but the minister, who started the disapproving movement."

"It doesn't seem possible that these drawling, gentle, inactive people could need such fierce excitement," said Helen.

"These drawling, gentle, inactive people—with the tiger underneath," supplemented Trenholm. "We are like the vegetation around us, and we have all the faults, the virtues, and the misfortunes of a tropical race."

"You haven't a tropical religion," said Helen. "Mrs. Mason surprised me not long ago with an exposition of doctrine strict enough to put an early Puritan to shame. I never listened to such delightful intolerance before; she had just come from a sewing society——"

"Wasn't the Inquisition a manifestation of a tropical religion?" suggested Thurston.

Helen glanced at him in surprise, and then laughed. If only once in a while he could do that when they were alone! "It is all so different," she began, and stopped.

"Never mind me," said Trenholm, "I know what you want to say, and there are days when I feel like attempting some bald brutal piece of realism; but no sooner do I take up my pen than, in place of the South as you see it, there rises up before me the ideal and beloved South as it ought to be; to a true Southerner these two are one."

"The trouble is that there are half a dozen Souths," said Thurston.

"All poor, all proud, and all alike under the heel of the money-lender!" said Trenholm.

"And yet this whole State is teeming with minerals; it is one of the first coal States in the country."

"We have no money to work our mines."

"Some of you have, and some have not; and you

can't deny that you raise double and treble the amount of cotton you raised in the time of slavery."

"And Northern speculators make all our labor a lottery. We cultivate our great cotton-fields for the barest sustenance; we are so ground down by poverty that we have almost forgotten that we were once gentlemen and ladies; and all because—man, woman, and child—we are bent on getting rich at a stroke. This little main street of Tallawara will go up and down a dozen times a month with the fever of Wall Street."

"I think you exaggerate, Trenholm," said Thurston. "Of course there is a certain amount of speculation; but you will find that almost everywhere."

"Exaggerate!" repeated Trenholm, passionately. "I only wish I did. Where are your eyes, Thurston, that you have not seen for yourself? It was only last March that a rascally broker made off with the earnings of the entire population of Tallawara, big and little, poor and rich; and the whole town was left prostrate, dirty, flat, and squalid, after the long, boiling excitement of a winter's incessant gambling. Even the negroes bought for a rise, and when they lost they blamed it on the white men."

"You'll find the same thing true of other parts of the country," said Thurston. "Your conditions are practically those of a new civilization, crude, somewhat uncultivated, and not sufficiently restrained by law."

"That last comes of our attitude toward the negro. It is an ever-present degradation; it brutalizes us."

"Why should it?" asked Helen.

Trenholm smiled as one does at the unsophisticated

questions of a child. "For one thing, Mrs. Thurston, because we are afraid of them; not with actual personal trembling, but, deep in the souls of all of us, dwells the abiding shadow of that horror—an insurrection. We say it is impossible; but, even at the thought we show our teeth and snarl with a dog-like courage all our own. Is it any wonder that you Northerners incur such rancorous hatred when you come down among us, to live among those people? You are hastening the process of evolution, and in that process may come a period of savage uprising, and then——"

He stopped. "It is terrible," breathed Helen.

"Terrible," repeated Trenholm, his eyes fixed on Ailsa, who, behind Helen's chair, came to a standstill, listening, with the tray slowly tipping again in her upraised hands. "Terrible and monstrous.—There you go again, Ailsa! I really beg your pardon, Mrs. Thurston."

Ailsa set the imperilled dish down in front of Helen and left the room in a towering rage.

When they rose from the table Thurston made some apology, and pleading a press of work at the college went to his own study, while Helen led the way to the drawing-room.

"By the way," said Trenholm, "how did you come across Ailsa? She doesn't often go into service. She has enough to live on without."

"Mrs. Mason sent her to me with the recommendation of being perfectly honest, too unusual and valuable a quality to pass by."

Trenholm picked up a small paper-cutter from the

table near him, and turned it over and over in his hand. "She is a strange character," he said at last, thoughtfully. "I have no doubt as to her honesty, but there is a brutal spirit in that magnificent exterior; you can never tell where it may break out. She nearly murdered a woman last spring."

At this minute Ailsa came into the room with a tray on which were two small cups of black coffee. She set it down in front of Helen on the table, looked at Trenholm ominously, and left.

"I wonder if she heard you?" said Helen.

"Very likely," said Trenholm, indifferently. "They often listen at the key-hole."

"I wonder they find it necessary—you people seem so utterly reckless about what you say before them."

"Half the time they don't understand."

"She understood what you were saying about an insurrection."

"Ailsa is a living, breathing insurrection herself," said Trenholm, lightly, and at that moment Ailsa suddenly came back into the room with a basket of silver in her hand; pushing aside the coffee-tray with a furious gesture she set the basket down at Helen's elbow. "Count it! Count it!" she shouted. "I'se honest; white honest, no nigger stealin's fo' me! You count dat silveh, an' den you come out an' count yo' china and yo' linen, an' do it to-night befo' I leave de house."

"Ailsa," said Helen, "have you gone crazy?"

"Yes, I is—crazy mad! I'se a brutal spirit, is I?" addressing Trenholm. "An' you cain't tell wha' I'll break out? Well; I'se broke out now, shore 'nuff, in a place you didn't expect!"

" Be quiet," said Trenholm, " and leave the room!"

Ailsa fell silent, but made no motion to go.

Trenholm rose, undecidedly, and his change of place seemed to unleash again all the woman's passion. " You betteh go y' own self," she cried, furiously, " callin' me names right in Mis' Helen's face at suppeh, an' tellin' how I done choke dat black Phœbe in de springtime.—Didn't she try to tole off Hannibal from me? You snake, you! What fo' ah you turnin' on yo' own flesh an' blood dat-a-way?"

" Be silent!" said Trenholm.

" I won't!" screamed Ailsa; " an' you ain't gwine gimme no ordehs. I ain't yo' nigger, if I is yo' sisteh!"

" You must leave the room," said Helen, her voice unnaturally quiet. " Ailsa — leave — the — room!" She advanced toward the infuriated woman a step at each word. Trenholm, who knew Ailsa better than she did, gave a smothered exclamation of alarm.

" I'm gwine mind her, an' I ain't gwine hurt her," said Ailsa, looking at him defiantly. " Ef she wants ter know whar from de hurt's a comin' to her, she betteh look behine her. I tell you, Mis' Helen," she said, solemnly, " you mark my warnin', you've got Satan at yo' right ear!"

At this moment Thurston came into the room. " What is this?" he said, quietly.

" I'm goin', suh, I'm a goin'," and with an odd bobbing courtesy and a sudden unnatural meekness Ailsa left the room.

The three who were left stood facing each other; a streak of lightning and a clap of thunder had passed

in the quiet room, and there was awe in the silence that followed.

"I beg you to believe," said Trenholm, "that I am in no way responsible for this." He bowed to Helen without offering her his hand, and Thurston followed him to the door.

Trenholm stood a moment on the step outside, the light from the hall-lamp shone down upon his face and he looked haggard and hunted.

"The woman has told the truth," he said. "She is—" He stopped.

"I know," said Thurston.

"Then you have heard it?" said Trenholm. "Thank you for sparing me the explanation."

XI

THE PIT

AILSA disappeared from Helen's kitchen the day after her outbreak with Trenholm, but she had the grace to supply her place with an older woman, who, though less beautiful in exterior, seemed to be more peaceful within; and after a short period of disquiet, the routine of the Thurston household again ran on smoothly. One raw December afternoon, three or four days later, Helen found herself on Mrs. Mason's porch, cheerfully ringing the large dinner-bell, which, in lieu of a door-bell, stood on a block near the door. A little colored boy, bare-foot and ragged, ran around the corner of the house.

"Are you here, Paley?" said Helen. "I am glad to see you, because I want you to come to the Episcopal church and pump the organ for me to-morrow."

"All right, Mis' Helen. You jus' go right in de parloh an' I'll call Ole Mis'; she's round in de pit."

"I will go out there," said Helen; "where is it?" She followed the boy to the side of the house, where a deep, square hole some fifteen feet across was cut into a slope of the terrace. The inside was arranged in a succession of low steps, one above the other, facing the southern sun. The top could be closed in with enormous sashes like a green-house, and a great tarpaulin

was rolled to one side, ready for use when the sun became too warm. The whole of the steps were banked with flowers: roses, chrysanthemums, jasmine—all the things that are produced, rare and sweet, in the Southern winter, and Mrs. Mason was standing below, her dress turned back under a coarse apron and her hands encased in leather gloves.

"Mrs. Thurston!" she called. "I'm just ashamed that you should find me down in the pit this way, but I must get these flowers potted before another frost."

"We wear ourselves out and break our backs every year over this old thing," said Zoë, who was coming from another part of the garden with an armful of rose-bushes. "Mamma thinks that nobody can do it but herself, and she won't have anyone to help but Paley's Evidences, who is simply no use at all."

"Who did name that child?" said Helen.

"I'm mortified to say that William James Mason named Paley; and he ought to be ashamed of himself for doing it, too!" said Mrs. Mason. "Here, you, Paley, go into the house and bring me out that other trowel." The child ran off toward the house, his rags fluttering about his bare little legs; he was grinning from ear to ear—a handsome little fellow, very nearly white. Helen looked after him admiringly.

"He'd be a mighty smart young one if he wasn't so wild. There's a kind of savageness in the blood of all that family, and Paley's not an improvement on the stock; but the rest of them are all a heap brighter than the other niggers round here. I suppose you've heard about them, Mrs. Thurston?"

"How under the sun is Mrs. Thurston going to know anything about the Carey darkies?" said Zoë.

"Well, I think they're a mighty interesting lot," said Mrs. Mason. "Old lady Trenholm's great-grandfather owned the first of them—I think he was governor of one of the Carolinas. Was he governor, or what was he, Zoë?"

"I don't know," said Zoë, impatiently. "He might have been the pope for all I care."

"We'll call him governor; it sounds more proper," said Mrs. Mason, placidly. "And so the governor bought this woman of a trader. The trader was a Yankee, Mrs. Thurston—we wouldn't have had any slaves down here if you all hadn't sold 'em to us."

"You needn't to have bought them, you know," said Helen, good-naturedly.

Zoë laughed, and Mrs. Mason continued her history. "When they brought the woman to the plantation, every nigger on the place went on their knees to her; at first they were afraid, for besides being some kind of a princess, they thought she was a witch; and none of them were willing to marry her until the old governor imported a man of her own kind. You can tell their descendants wherever you see them; their features are finer, their skins are lighter, and they have more intelligence than the black people. Now, that man there; do you see him?" She pointed across the garden to where a tall, heavily built, jet black African was digging up a flower-bed. "Now, that's Ailsa's husband—he's the real thing."

Involuntarily Helen looked at Paley's Evidences.

Mrs. Mason shrugged her shoulders, arched her

brows, and shook her head meaningly at Zoë's back. "Have you seen anything of Jim Trenholm lately?" she asked, ostentatiously changing the subject.

"Not for several days. He came to our house to dinner, and has not been there since."

"I think he might have had the politeness to call," said Zoë, contemptuously.

"Oh, no; I hardly expect him so soon."

"Don't people call when they have been asked to dinner up North?" asked Mrs. Mason, with sudden interest.

"Of course they do; but, to tell the truth, Mr. Trenholm didn't have a very pleasant evening at our house."

The two women faced Helen, full of curiosity. "I knew that had happened," said Mrs. Mason.

"You knew what had happened?"

"Oh, Ailsa broke out," said Zoë. "We've had her here for a day or two making mattresses, and she let it out without meaning to yesterday. Was she very bad?"

Helen looked from one to the other, hardly wishing to answer. "Is she often violent?" she asked, at last.

"She has been violent to Jim," said Zoë, "and yet she's afraid of him, too—that's the queerest part of it —she's deadly afraid of him."

"And Jim's done more for her than he has for any other nigger in Tallawara!" said Mrs. Mason, indignantly. "If she'd only behave herself, she'd be a mighty valuable servant; but I reckon she can't help it. She's been just a little 'off' every once in a while—ever since Paley was born."

"It's queer the feeling I have about Ailsa," said Zoë.

"I never can forget she's alive, the way I do with the other niggers; but I don't believe she's any more crazy than you are, mamma; she's a regular hoodoo, that's what she is!"

"Nonsense, Zoë Mason!" said her mother. "You know you are as fond of Ailsa as you can be; and as for being a hoodoo, what could she do to you, anyhow?"

"There's nothing she wouldn't do, if she took it into her head," said Zoë; "and it's plumb unnatural the way she finds things out. She knows everything that happens in the whole town—the most secret things! I've always been sure that Ailsa knew who killed the old General!"

"How many times have I told you, Zoë Mason," said her mother, sharply, "that you are not to say 'plumb'? It's sure-enough disgraceful, right here before Mrs. Thurston. And as for the General, if Jim chooses to hush that matter up, it isn't for any of the rest of us to open it again. You don't know who killed him, and neither do I; and we might just as well keep our mouths shut. I suppose you've heard about it?" she added to Helen, by way of closing the subject.

"Mrs. Bruce told me."

"What did she tell you?" said Zoë, quickly.

"Nothing more than the usual thing—that Mr. Trenholm's father was found stabbed to death. She seemed to think that it was a mystery that no one could solve."

"Well," said Zoë, tossing her head as she went off to the other end of the garden for some more plants, "I bet you Ailsa could solve it, if anyone could make her speak."

Helen looked after her curiously, wondering a little why she was so persistent.

"Zoë will stick to it that Gus Johnson is at the bottom of that murder," said Mrs. Mason. "He and the General had a mighty ugly row about ten or twelve years ago, and the old General allowed he'd shoot Gus on sight. Of course he didn't mean it,—the old gentleman was always allowing to shoot somebody or other, and it somehow made him right unpopular. He had a heap of enemies, specially the Johnsons. They haven't ever been real good friends, the Johnsons and the Trenholms. Why, just after the war the General got mad about something and went to Gus Johnson's father's office and made old Billy go down on his knees and apologize for a lot of things, and promise that hereafter he'd take a back seat in Tallawara affairs; it just naturally mortified old Billy Johnson, and there's been strained relations between the families ever since."

"Is it a feud?" asked Helen, with sudden interest.

"Of course not! You people in the North think we're always having feuds down here. Why, you never find a feud anywhere, unless it might be among some of the mountain people, or up there in Kentucky. But you see, when three men of a family are all killed, you somehow get to expecting that they'll none of them die in their beds. And Jim's mighty careless, too. He hasn't made Gus Johnson go down on his knees—at least not his sure-enough knees—but he's kind of kept him under ever since I can remember, and made him take a back seat, too. Gus don't like it, you see; you know what kind of a man Gus Johnson is yourself."

Helen looked at Mrs. Mason inquiringly. "I know hardly anything about him," she said, with a little accent of surprise.

"Oh, there's no need to be so careful as all that! To be sure we don't gossip down here, but everybody knows about Gus Johnson; and while we're mentioning it, I must say I was shocked when Anne Bruce told me about that evening down there at the Guthrie Mansion. It's mighty indelicate for a lady to allude to anything like that, and I don't see how she came to do it."

"Like what?"

"Why, about your apron. Of course she knew, just as well as not, how it got there, and she ought to have gone out of the room and not said another word. I'm sure I don't know what possessed her! She told me she wasn't able to hold up her head for the rest of the evening; and I don't wonder at it. It was beautiful, though, the way you behaved. Anne Bruce told me that you just showed Gus Johnson what you thought of him in your actions—there's nothing burns deeper than a silent scorn!"

A glimmering of light had come to Helen. "What I thought of Mr. Johnson? I was not thinking of him at all; I was thinking of Ailsa; I was disappointed in her."

"Oh, yes—Ailsa," said Mrs. Mason, deprecatingly. "Of course; Gus Johnson's only a man; but then, when all's said and done, Ailsa's only a nigger. According to her lights, she's got more occasion for pride than for shame; at the same time, I do hold that in a case of this kind the woman, even if she is black,—is some responsible." Helen saw at last. A deep flush burned on

her forehead and an intolerable choking rose in her throat. She drew a couple of long breaths and stood up.

"Well, mamma," said Zoë, coming back with another armful of plants, "I hope you're not gossiping about Jim yet. People are always talking about Jim down here," she added, addressing Helen; "and there's not a word of truth in the stories they tell. It's plu—," —Zoë looked with mock terror at her mother's back— "outrageous!"

"You wouldn't believe," called Mrs. Mason, "how Zoë Mason blows Jim up to his face whenever she sees him."

"It's a good deal better than to blow him up behind his back!"

"You're a disrespectful thing!" said Mrs. Mason, turning around. "Why, Mrs. Thurston, you're not going? I'm just done."

But Helen muttered a hurried good-by and turned away; she felt dizzy and uncertain of her steps; she remembered the same feeling once in the city when she had slipped and fallen into a shallow culvert: a sensation of incredible soil and personal degradation.

XII

THE RECTOR

NESTLED among the tall trees at the end of one of the Tallawara streets was a little cemetery, sad and picturesque, with tangled vines, leaning stones and lonely graves by narrow red paths that wound through cool, green depths of gloom in and out under the hanging moss; a great dignity and simplicity lingered about this sad spot. In front of it was the small stone church, built by Trenholm's mother, and at one side, on the brow of the hill, stood the rectory, a rambling, wooden building, half in ruins from lack of care. Living there alone was the rector, a slight old man, lovable and opinionated. No one knew why he stayed with this limited congregation upon his meagre salary, when his gifts would have made him welcome elsewhere, with larger opportunities and infinitely greater comfort, but he was one of those men who make their position; and Tallawara would have been a smaller place without him. He had lent Helen a key to the church when he found that she shared his love of music, and for the past ten days she had been in the habit of going there to play on the organ. The rector himself had frequently stolen in to listen to her, but he was apt to come away shaking his head.

"You do not like it?" she said to him, stopping in the midst of her playing, when on the day after her

visit at Mrs. Mason's she had detected him in one of these emphatic demonstrations of disapproval.

"It is all wrong,—wrong from beginning to end," he said.

"Wrong?"

"Morally wrong! Pagan!"

"There is no harm in being pagan; but if you would like some other kind of music——"

"The kind of music has nothing to do with it; it is the way you interpret it; and as for not liking it—the trouble is, I like it too much; it stirs up forgotten things."

"And yet you are the one who reproached me for hiding my talent in a napkin!"

"But how was I to know that it was such a—a—devilish talent?" blurted out the rector, whimsically.

"You should have investigated beforehand," said Helen, smiling.

"I did! I did!" protested the rector with an amusing assumption of despair. "You told me yourself that you had given up practising; and everybody knows what to expect from young ladies who say that. In reality you have got in under false pretences."

"Why don't you send me off?"

"Then I should have no music for Christmas."

"It is a frightful predicament, but Christmas being a pagan rite, you ought not to mind."

"There will be no pagan rites in my church on Christmas Day; I am quite competent to cope with that," said the rector, firmly. "But seriously, this gift of yours deserves better treatment from you; why—why, it just stops short of genius!"

"Yes, it does; that is the reason I give up cultivating it."

"And a great impertinence to your Maker your reason is!" retorted the rector, hotly. "Do you mean to tell me that a piece of fantastic caprice is your sole ground for casting a talent like yours to the winds?"

"Perhaps I am like you — it stirs up forgotten things."

"Forgotten things! At your age!"

"Had you nothing to forget at twenty-six?"

She asked it lightly, but the rector did not return her smile. "Twenty-six!" he murmured. "Are you so old as that? God help us! At twenty-six I was dead and buried, long ago!"

He started out of the organ-loft and was half way across the church when Helen spoke softly: "You seem to have more vitality dead than the most of us have living."

"That was prettily turned—very prettily turned," said the rector. "Be sure you lock the door when you come out. I am going through the vestry."

The organ was at the right of the pulpit, in a little recess screened by simple carvings like Gothic windows. The crimson curtains were half drawn and Helen could not see beyond the lighted candles that stood on either side of the music-rack, for the day was cloudy and the church was dim. She did not notice, therefore, when someone softly opened the door of the nave and slipped into a back seat in the darkness. For nearly an hour she played on with her notes and then closed the book. "Pump harder now, Paley," she called. "This pagan music needs a great deal of wind."

"Yes'm," Paley's sleepy voice answered from behind the organ, and a moment of violent thumping followed. Then a little sobbing, wailing tune cried out in the twilight. The listener in the back seat sat up suddenly. The ruddy glow of the candles shone down on Helen's face, thrown back as if she listened, and over and over came the same refrain until the pain of the iteration became almost physical; fuller and fuller came the harmony, pulsing and beating, until the still air of the little church rocked in an agonizing cry of longing for something unknown, something withheld. The light from outside, coming more and more dimly through the yellow windows, at last faded away entirely, and the red gloom of the interior deepened into blackness.

Helen rose, shut the organ, and after blowing out the candles, came slowly down the aisle with Paley close behind her. She passed the man in the back seat, unconscious of his presence, went out, shut the door, and turned the key. There was a faint laugh in the silence, checked almost as soon as it began, for the involuntary prisoner became conscious that he was not alone. There had been a fire in the stove, and the embers threw a long ray in a straight line across the white head of an old man, who had come forward and was kneeling at the railing of the chancel.

It was the rector, and he prayed aloud:

"Out of the depths, out of the depths, O Lord! I have cried unto Thee for these my people, and Thou hast denied me! I have dedicated my life to them; I have poured out my days for them. The mind Thou gavest me has lain inactive, and the talents Thou hast

bestowed upon me have rusted in the dust. I have renounced my nation, because my country was this narrow fold; I have turned my face from love, because my home was with my flock; I have given up fame, I have starved my heart, and sacrificed my soul; and Thou, O Lord! hast made light of the offering! All I have asked of Thee has been this one little spot. In vain toil—that I might cleanse it and brighten it, and make it more like unto Thy kingdom—I have spent my years, and it has not availed; not one whit! All about the streets the men go, ready to murder their fellows, and the women, light-hearted, shallow-minded, see but little of the sin that surrounds them. Thy curse, O Lord, thy heavy curse is upon all this people, upon all this land, in this terrible race with which, for our sins, Thou hast afflicted us. We have sinned; we have sinned, indeed; but bitter as is our atonement, Thou wilt not accept it. Heavier and heavier Thine hand lies upon us; Thou makest us to be our own scourges for our sins. Lift, O Lord, lift the degradation which Thou hast bound upon Thy people; grant us wisdom, give us light! For in Thine awful displeasure Thou hast taken away from us all that could help us. Fools and blind hast Thou made us! Darkness Thou hast caused to envelop us!"

The old man's voice broke here; he bent his head upon his hands. The man in the back pew sank upon his knees, and for a moment the church was still.

"Lord," breathed the supplicating voice in the darkness, "Lord, hast Thou forgotten?"

There was a sound of voices outside the church-door and again the key grated in the lock.

The old clergyman slipped back from the chancel, and Helen, standing against the half twilight in the open doorway, saw no one. "Is there anybody here?" she asked. "Mr. Trenholm! Paley said I had locked you in."

"I done saw him plain as day!" protested Paley, peering in under her arm. "My Lord, Mis' Hel'n! what if it wuz one o' dese hy'r gos'esses?"

"Mr. Trenholm is certainly not here now. Don't drag my skirt, child!" Trenholm heard her protest, and then the door was locked again.

"Trenholm," said the rector, advancing down the aisle, "Trenholm!" The old gentleman was standing with his hand on the door of the pew. "James!" he thundered at last, "if you are skulking in there because you caught me praying, you can come out. I have prayed too many years of my life to be ashamed of it now."

Trenholm stood up. "I am here," he answered, meekly.

"What are you doing here?"

There was a short pause. "Praying, sir."

"Stuff!" said the old man, severely; "irreverent stuff! Come home with me to supper and have a smoke."

The two crossed to the rectory in the dark. The door stood wide open—Dr. Rider long ago had lost every stealable possession he had—they entered the bare, bleak study together, and Trenholm hurried to assist in making a fire. After a long delay and some audible protests from the cabin in the yard, where the cooking was conducted, the supper appeared.

"I see you are boarding yet at Anne Bruce's," the rector said. "That woman gave me such dyspepsia with her rich food that I had to leave. It was sheer murder on her part." Trenholm looked at the meal which the lazy negro boy had brought in on a japanned tray, covered with a newspaper, and noting the pickles and fried flapjacks, the strong tea, and stronger butter, wondered if the rector's present arrangements were any more hygienic than those he condemned. "Eating is a mistake, anyway," the rector continued; and Trenholm truthfully agreed that under some circumstances it was.

Supper over, the two men sat together and smoked. "James, what were you doing in the church?" the old man said, suddenly; and taking his pipe from his mouth, he looked at his guest disapprovingly.

"Upon my word and honor, sir," protested Trenholm, who could never divest himself of the feeling of awe with which, from his youth up, he had regarded the rector, "I went in to see who was playing, wholly ignorant that Mrs. Thurston was there."

"Um—" said Dr. Rider, dubiously. "And when your ignorance was enlightened, my son, why didn't you come out again?"

"I assure you, sir, that I had no intention of letting Mrs. Thurston suspect my presence."

"It was just a simple case of eaves-dropping, then?" said the rector, dryly.

Trenholm took no offence. The old gentleman had taught him his letters, prepared him for college, scolded him, petted him, badgered him to his face, and praised him behind his back ever since he could remember.

"I wanted to hear her play," he said. "There was no harm in that—you were doing it yourself."

"What did you want to hear her play for?"

"Oh—for one thing—because I am fond of music."

"Come, come! that'll not do. I know all the things that you're fond of, James, and although you may think you like it, music is not one of them. You are fond of emotions, however; that I'll not deny! Now what particular emotion were you in pursuit of this afternoon?"

"I was not in pursuit of any emotion! And as for my not being fond of music, those things that she was playing were all of them familiar to me; her interpretation was interesting; it threw a curious light on the character of the woman herself."

"Ah—ha! We have tracked our emotion already. What business have you to be throwing curious lights on young women's characters?"

"For that matter," retorted Trenholm, "what business have you?"

"Business?" said the rector. "It is the business I am here in the world for. That music showed me I might help a struggling soul; the woman is searching for something."

"We all are," said Trenholm. "We are 'seekin',' as the darkies say."

The old man sighed and put his pipe in his mouth again. "She is an extraordinary person," he said at last. "I'm afraid, James, I'm very much afraid that she is an unbeliever!"

"Oh, well," said Trenholm, consolingly, "she can't help that."

"I'd like to know why she can't! It seems to me that it is a most unfeminine state of mind. Now you, James, I should be surprised if you were anything else; but for a woman! There is something horrible about it!"

"I do hope she has more sense than to talk of her heterodoxies."

"Man," said the rector, solemnly, "she doesn't know that she has any! That woman has been brought up from childhood with no more attention given to her religious training than if she were a Hottentot. A Hottentot, I say!—What an awful state the North must be in!"

Trenholm puffed his pipe in silence a moment or two, and then: "Pleasant race, those Hottentots," he remarked.

"Yes,"—the old rector turned on him fiercely—"and you tell me you went into the church this evening not knowing who was playing! Now, then, Jim, you have got to stop it! You have made mischief in my parish before now; but you have never made any scandal—you left that for your father."

Trenholm looked up at him angrily.

"I know what I am about," said the rector, firmly. "I alluded to your father on purpose. You have got his blood strong in your veins and you are spoiling with idleness. It is high time you left. If you can't go North, go farther South; you're in mischief here from morning to night."

"I am not a boy of twenty-one! You forget, sir, that I am a man. Why, I am middle-aged!"

"So much the worse! so much the worse! Every

year you knock off is a warning removed from a dangerous road. So long as your youth, your inexperience, your very frivolity put up ' No Thoroughfare ' on the path to your heart, I washed my hands of responsibility. Nobody but a fool could have believed in you ten years ago! But now, that little sprinkle of gray around the temples, that sorrowful droop to your eyelids, even the ugly lines about your mouth and the crow's-feet at the corners of your eyes all offer assurances of safety. It would almost take a fool to mistrust you now, my son."

" I am sorry that you should feel so little confidence in me, sir!"

The rector twinkled a moment at Trenholm, but was not to be diverted from the subject in hand. " You needn't try to throw me off the track with your cool impertinence!" he said; " and as for confidence in you, I have confidence in you when you are in your right place,—just as I am pretty sure of a pound of dynamite when it's under a ledge of rock in a stone-quarry; but I don't feel the same about having it kicking about the streets of Tallawara. Here you are, setting the whole town agog, walking out in the evening with Mrs. Thurston; starting all the gossips full cry after that poor young Long girl at the Mission; turning Zoë Mason's head with your nonsense, and keeping Anne Bruce's silly heart in the same perpetual ferment it has been in over you ever since you both were eighteen."

" It did not prevent her marrying Bruce."

" And she did right; better to marry Bruce than to live with Yarnell and her sister Clara; but at the same time, when you broke your engagement with that

woman when you were twenty, Jim Trenholm, you broke her heart, and you know you did."

"A boy like that is not to blame!"

"You never were a boy about those things! You knew better at the time; I warned you that you were going too far."

"Yes, sir; and if you hadn't I might have stopped."

"No such thing! no such thing! Whatever you are, Jim, you are not contrary; and by warning you now that you are town talk in regard to Miss Long, and very nearly town talk in regard to Mrs. Thurston, I feel that I am not throwing words away."

Trenholm rose to go, and the rector came to the door with him. "Are you going North or South, Jim?" he asked.

Trenholm looked him in the eye. "Neither, sir. Good-night."

The rector stood on the porch, puffing thoughtfully at his pipe. Suddenly he drew it from his mouth. "James," he called; "Jim! O, Jim!"

Trenholm came back and stood at the foot of the steps looking up.

"James," said the rector, solemnly, "I hope those women up North don't find you as attractive as our women down here do."

"No," said Trenholm, simply, "I don't believe they like me at all."

The rector thought a minute. "Confound their impudence! What do they mean by it?" he shouted angrily.

Trenholm laughed and turned away.

XIII

CAUSES

MISS LOCKE and Miriam Long had been reading Montaigne together. "I think," said Miss Locke, "that in most of the difficult questions of life this old fellow's shrewd, incisive, caustic advice stands us in better stead than all the religion and sentiment we can cull from Pascal or Thomas à Kempis."

Miriam sighed; it was a mere breath, but it was touched with impatience. For her needs, alas, Montaigne was not always adequate. There are voids in youth which even caustic advice is powerless to fill.

Miss Locke noted the girl's petulance with the half-kindly, half-tolerant smile of forty that is so wholly insupportable when we are twenty-two. "What is the matter?" she said.

"Oh, nothing," said Miriam, "only I wish you would find in Montaigne something that would throw light upon the burning questions of the hour—Whether Aunt Clemmy stole Miss Edwards's spool of white cotton, for example, or did it roll into a crack of the floor? Whether Abraham Cutler and Georgie King were not properly converted by my father before experiencing religion at the Methodist revival, as they unlawfully claim they did last week? Then, too, there is dear Miss Simmons, who is just now engaged in

turning the black silk for the fifth time. She is awfully undecided on the question of gores; do you think Montaigne would sanction gores? You know 'A full skirt,' as Miss Simmons says, 'is a full skirt always.'"

"Miriam! Are you growing bitter?"

Miriam turned away her head; her lip quivered. "It is so deadly dull!"

"But you have books; you study and read."

"Yes—I study; I read; sometimes I even think."

"Yes?" queried Miss Locke. "You think?"

"This morning, for example, I am thinking of how, when I was down street yesterday afternoon, Miss Zoë Mason drove by me in her buggy and called, 'Come down and see my samples; I have got a whole heap of them from New York!' It almost seemed as if she spoke to me. I was even fool enough to look up and smile."

"Yes?"

"Well, that is all; she spoke to someone behind me." Miriam sat up very straight, her bright color, just then almost hectic, mounting to her cheek-bones and making her eyes seem of a clear, beautiful green. Her hair, which, in spite of the verdict of the negroes, was a dark chestnut, had been pushed back from her face during the reading. "Perhaps," she added, "I, even I, might have liked to go down and see samples. We are so inconsistently made!"

Involuntarily Miss Locke glanced at the gown the girl was wearing. It was of a fine, green cloth, that shaded exquisitely into the color of her eyes, and it was finished with a heavy corded white silk vest that gave it an air at once boyish and dainty. It was a costly

dress; and not only that, it showed a sense of the becoming, and a consciousness of the owner's own appearance so thorough as to amount almost to coquetry.

"You do not need to look at samples when you have a gown like that. Did you buy it because it matched your eyes?"

"Yes."

"You don't mean to say you knew it?"

"Why not? I am fond of pretty things, and of late I have been able to gratify my weakness. I don't suppose you know," she said, looking at Miss Locke, shyly, "that I inherited property from my mother and that, in my small way, I am something of an heiress."

"Then you are not compelled to remain here?"

"I am needed here."

"You ought to go away. You are depressed; you are tired; and things make an impression upon you out of all proportion to their importance."

"Samples, you mean?"

"After all, you have very little in common with Zoë Mason," said Miss Locke, evasively. "Why should you care?"

"For Zoë Mason I don't care! But for the life I am living, who could help but care? What have I done, what have we any of us done that we should be treated as outcasts? My father is the equal of any man in Tallawara,—the superior of most of them. Miss Simmons and Miss Edwards, in the mere question of family, have the advantage in social position and tradition of almost everybody in the place; they have come to teach these poor, good-natured, simple black people—to try to help them to be better citizens and better men

and women; what they are doing is really for the benefit of the community,—and what is their reward?" She had jumped to her feet and was walking rapidly up and down the room.

"Let me tell you something," said Miss Locke; "it is not what they are doing,—it is the way they are doing it that cuts them off. For example: that young mulatto clergyman who came down here not long ago, did he take his meals with you?"

"Yes," said Miriam.

"And Miss Simmons and Miss Edwards went out driving with him?"

"Yes. Why not?"

"Did you go with them?"

Miriam's face flushed. "My father,"—she hesitated —"my father said it was unnecessary. I did not wish to go; but the man was a scholarly, well-educated man, nevertheless!"

"He is a negro," said Miss Locke. "When he was here, he took supper with his cousin, Abraham, the brother of old Louis, James's servant."

"Miss Simmons and my father went to Abraham's with him."

"There it is again!" said Miss Locke. "And Miss Simmons and your father have been here twenty years without learning that you can't do that!"

"I think that if my father had it all to do over again he would do it differently."

"Miss Simmons and Miss Edwards would not!"

"Why do you say that?"

"Because Miss Simmonses and Miss Edwardses come down here year after year in tens and scores and

make the same mistake over and over, alienating every particle of sympathy or good-will that the Southerners might feel for them."

"But that young clergyman: he writes for the leading magazines, he is a person of cultivation; there are not half a dozen men in Tallawara who could hold their own with him. What awful injustice!"

Miss Locke held up her hand. "We needn't go into that," she said; "we are only speaking now of the causes which shut off your father and the ladies at the Mission from the friendly intercourse with these hospitable, warm-hearted, but intensely prejudiced people. It is too late to change now; and for that reason, it seems to me, as I said before, that it would be better for you to go away."

"For that reason I stay. If there were any hope of amelioration or change in my father's situation, it would be different."

"Couldn't you persuade him to leave with you?"

"He has lived here thirty years."

"And do you mean to say that you propose sacrificing your whole life to him and remaining here always without friends, or companionship?"

"I don't know what I mean," said Miriam, sadly. At that minute a man's tread was heard on the porch, and the next instant Trenholm passed the window, coming, apparently, from the back of the house. He opened the door and came into the parlor without knocking. Miriam's face flushed slowly; she was conscious that Miss Locke was watching her.

"I am telling Miss Long that she ought to leave here," said Miss Locke.

"Does Miss Long wish to go?" Trenholm looked inquiringly at Miriam, who slightly shook her head.

"She ought to wish to go," said Miss Locke, decisively. "She is wasting her time and starving her talents vegetating in a place like this!"

"I know one woman," said Trenholm, "who, without any tie whatever, consents to vegetate in a little place like this."

"Nonsense!" said Miss Locke; "if you mean me, mine is a different case; I am staying here on your account."

Trenholm flashed one brilliant, half-smiling, mischievous look at Miriam. "It's an excellent reason; I wish Miss Long's case were similar," he said, softly.

At that moment Miss Locke's maid Sue burst in at the door. "Mis' Sarah, when you comin' to tell me how I gwine make dem cakes?"

"You know how, perfectly well," said Miss Locke, impatiently, not turning her head, while the woman winked drolly at Trenholm from over her shoulder.

"I'm a doin' my bes' at it, Mis' Sarah; is three cups o' butteh mos' enough?"

"Three cups of butter in plain cookies?" cried Miss Locke, horrified.

"Seems to me fo' makes a heap o' butteh for only two cups o' flour."

"Sue, have you taken leave of your senses?"

"I don't b'lieve I has any senses dis mawnin', Mis' Sarah. I done got such a mis'ry in my haid dat dere's no knowin' what I'll do nex'. I smells sumfin mighty like burnin' now. Mebbe it's de house afire." A strong odor of scorching pervaded the room, but Sue

never stirred. "Dere's coffee in de oven, too," she added, sadly.

Miss Locke's coffee was her pride as well as her weakness; she fled kitchenward.

"Scorchin' coffee bound to fotch her," giggled Sue, turning to Trenholm. "You all got ter gimme anodder dime fo' dat, Mars' Jim; Mis' Sarah's gwine be in a powerful rage."

"Be off!" said Trenholm, impatiently.

Sue went, and Trenholm turned to Miriam, smiling like a naughty but lovable little boy.

"Oh," she said, "what did you do that for?"

"For you. Why didn't you answer my note?"

"You knew that I couldn't come."

"Just for a little walk?"

"But we might meet people; and what would they say?"

"We need not meet them."

"I don't wish to be talked about. If it was common gossip such as I hear about you and Miss Mason, I should not mind."

"Then drive with me. You can meet me at the small cross-road behind your house; no one will see at all, if you insist."

"I must not do it."

"Do you think that you would not enjoy it?"

She drew a sudden breath and looked longingly into the blue of the sky. She had been caged so long!

"You would like to go, then?"

"You know I should."

"Then why not go? All the girls here do; you saw me out with Zoë Mason yesterday."

"I have told you that it is not the same! There is something clandestine about it; it is hateful to me!"

"Clandestine!" said Trenholm, angrily. "What an unpleasant word for a young lady! How can it be clandestine when your father doesn't object? He allowed you not only to walk with me, but I drove with you several times at Ocean Bay."

"You know that he would say yes to anything I asked him; and you know, too, that he doesn't count; but Miss Locke—Miss Locke would not approve."

"Are you responsible to Miss Locke?"

"It seems so deceitful; she—she—asked me to her house; I met you here——"

"Not through any good-will of hers!"

"But I don't like to meet you on the back road!"

"I will drive with you down the main street at two in the afternoon, if you say so."

"If you did, you know that there's not a girl in Tallawara who would ever drive with you again!"

Trenholm drew up a chair and seated himself in front of her. "Miriam," he said, "are the girls of Tallawara necessary to my happiness?"

"No; nor is Miss Long necessary to your happiness," she answered, with a very pretty little dignity.

"Miss Long, will you drive with me this afternoon?" He bent over, and, taking a fold of her dress, doubled it in pleats in his fingers. Miriam's heart beat; she watched his hands; they were long and delicate, yet strong.

"Ah, Miss Long," he pleaded, looking up into her eyes, "do not say no."

At that moment Miss Locke, flushed and angry,

came into the room. "I sometimes think that Sue is possessed," she said.

"I'm sure of it," said Miriam, quickly; "and by a very bad and impudent devil." She rose as she spoke and bade Miss Locke good-by. "Good-by, Mr. Trenholm," she added.

"Let me come to the gate with you," said Trenholm.

"No, Jim, I want you here," said Miss Locke; "there is a picture I want you to hang, and I can't reach the nail; and—and—oh, there are ever so many things I want you to do for me, Jim!"

Trenholm shrugged his shoulders helplessly, and Miriam left the room.

XIV

A DIFFERENT MAGNETISM

THAT afternoon Trenholm's phaëton drew up at the cross-road behind the Longs' barn. He came early, as he had not been able to specify the hour. The road, deep between the perpendicular walls of bright terra-cotta colored clay, was seldom travelled, and Trenholm sat there alone, looking up occasionally at the green foliage of the long-needled pine and then glancing a little back to where, on the top of the barn, five solemn buzzards on the comb of the roof kept him company. Occasionally one of them would lift himself laboriously and soar off into the sky until he became a mere speck wheeling lazily in the blue.

Trenholm was not an impatient man, but when an hour had passed with no sign of Miriam, the color began to mount slowly to his face; he sat unnaturally quiet; his eyes glittered and his lips grew tense. At last the carpenter from the Mission passed, and Trenholm called him. "Look here, Abe," he said, "I want you to go up to the house and see if Mr. Long is there."

Before long Abraham came back. "Old Mist' Long done gone to Prestonpans," he announced; a fact of which the diplomatic Trenholm was already aware.

"Is Miss Simmons up there?" asked Trenholm, "or

Miss Edwards?" He had seen them drive off with Mr. Long that morning.

"No, sah, dey done gone, too," said Abe.

"Then you go and ask Miss Long if she'll come down here; say I want to speak with her a minute."

There was quite a long period of waiting after this; but finally Abe came, limping along the narrow path that led down the roadside. "Mis' Miriam say she done 'bleeged to teach de class ob big girls dere Bible lesson fo' Sunday, Mars' Jim, and afteh dat she got a sewin'-class ob de infantry. She say it gwine take her 'til dawk, suh." Abe felt apologetic; this was not the kind of message he was accustomed to hear sent to a Trenholm.—"Mis' Mi'iam mighty sorry, suh," he added, politely.

"Did she say so?"

Abraham scratched his head. "Well, suh, she didn't 'zactly say so, but she looked mighty put out."

"Thank you, Abe," said Trenholm; and throwing the man a quarter of a dollar, he drove off. He continued on his way until the road widened, and then he turned his horse and drove back, intending to pass through the town again.

As he neared the spot where he had been waiting, he was startled to see a man lying full length on the upper side of the bank, where, when he was facing the other way, the slope had hidden him from view. The man in his turn was equally startled at Trenholm's return; he scrambled to his feet.

It was Johnson. "Attractive road," he said, looking down.

"Very," said Trenholm.

"Going out buggy-riding?" asked Johnson.

Buggy-riding in Tallawara always implied a young lady. Trenholm made no answer.

"'Pears to me she's keeping you waiting pretty long," said Johnson, aggravatingly.

Trenholm had no intention of allowing Johnson to imagine that he was waiting there for Miriam. He was about to frame some plausible excuse when, down the road, walking slowly, came his falsehood, in person. Johnson grinned significantly and dropped into his old place in the matted Bermuda grass.

Trenholm drove forward to meet Helen Thurston. "Don't you want a lift?" he called; "I will drive anywhere you say." He jumped down, and, holding the reins in one hand, offered the other to assist her in. "Wouldn't you like a breath of air outside the town limits?" he added.

Helen hesitated and then stepped into the phaëton. "If I go, I shall need a wrap of some kind," she said. "Can you take me back to our house first?"

"Certainly, I will take you home," said Trenholm, in an unnecessarily loud voice.

Johnson sat up and slapped his thigh in an unholy glee that was more than half relief; he had believed that Trenholm was waiting there for Miriam Long.

Trenholm's conscience afflicted him, and it was in vain that he told himself that he had not had time to think, that he would have done the same whether Johnson had been there or not, and that therefore he had not lied; he was filled with self-disgust at his duplicity.

When they drew up at the Thurstons' gate Helen

ran in directly to her husband's study. "Is there any reason why I shouldn't go out to drive with Mr. Trenholm?" she asked.

Thurston had never wholly liked Trenholm; but for this very reason he was more inclined to give his consent, as his personal preference seemed unworthy of consideration.

"He is waiting," said Helen. "Is it all right to go on?"

"Of course," said Thurston; "I will put you into the carriage." Helen ran upstairs for her cloak, and she and Thurston came out together. Trenholm almost hoped that he had come to apologize and to detain his wife; in that case, he decided he would go back and "have it out with Johnson." But Thurston helped Helen into the phaëton and saw them drive away with apparent satisfaction.

"Your husband is a self-denying man," said Trenholm.

"Even if I had stayed at home, he would not have known it," said Helen. "He is extremely busy."

"How do you pass your time here?" asked Trenholm.

Helen laughed. "If you knew how often I am asked that, and how incongruous it always seems! I never have time enough. Do you?"

"It has been a good many years," he said, "since time has actually hung heavy on my hands. But there have been moments, of late, when I have been afraid that it was dragging. Is keeping house, then, such an absorbing occupation?"

"But I have always kept house, you know."

"And is it the same thing here that it was in Great Dulwich?"

"It is a little less complicated." She spoke as if the subject wearied her.

Trenholm turned his head and looked down at her, smiling. "So you refuse to tell me?"

"But what do you wish to know?"

"How you manage to get through the day."

"I do not need to manage; the day flies."

"What aggressive, what almost insolent happiness!"

Helen shrugged her shoulders, and for a while they drove on in silence.

Trenholm had a feeling of being turned away at the very entrance of one of the paths which led into that pleasant country of the personal where the atmosphere always agreed with him. At last: "I heard you playing in the church—was it yesterday?" he said, trying another route.

"Then you *were* there! Why didn't you speak?"

Trenholm hesitated a moment. "I felt like an intruder." He flicked the horse with the whip. "To tell the truth, the music upset me. One has no right to play like that."

"I am not responsible for the music."

"No?" he answered, doubtfully. "Perhaps not." And half under his breath he began to whistle the air of the last thing she had played on the day before.

A thin silvery halo gathered about the sun, bringing that sad suggestion of autumn which seems to dwell forever in the winters of the South. Helen leaned back and watched the landscape that spread before

them in a succession of tumbling hillocks, rough as if some gigantic sleeper had tossed through ages of unrest below the tangled, brindled grass.

"This country has an expression of its own," she said, dreamily. "I have seen the same in faces; something final has happened to it; it has reached some ultimate reality incredibly wild and strange. Its melancholy and hopelessness well up perpetually from sources deep under ground; it is like a groan; it frightens me,—I am frightened all the time."

"Of what are you afraid?"

"It is not real fright. It is a—flutter, an excitement, something one instinctively resists. I—can't explain."

"I understand. I always have that feeling, at first, in a strange country. It is the spirit of the land, a different magnetism; it disturbs us—until we learn to vibrate with it."

"But I do not wish to learn!" protested Helen. "Everything is too alien to me—your shaggy fields, where the red gashes in the earth show through like rusty blood; your mournful trees, your low horizon——"

"You should see that in the summer," interrupted Trenholm, waving his hand toward a plantation at the roadside, "with the blossoms blue and pink and white, the tufts of cotton like Northern snow, the wild field-hands picking and singing up and down the rows, and the hot air quivering over it in the sun."

"I would sacrifice all your flowers, all your cotton, and even your sunshine, for one green Northern field with the blue, cold mountains in the distance and a

sharp touch of an east wind in the air—one thirsts for it!"

"Purely an intellectual affection!" said Trenholm, teasingly. "It will pass like one of your Northern snows in spring-time; the spirit of the South has begun to take possession of you; you are already in thrall. You will tear yourself away from us with pain; all your life hereafter will be spent in longing. You will forget that an east wind ever was——"

"Never!" interrupted Helen. "I utterly refuse to taste of pomegranate-seed."

"It is too late; you have already tasted your pomegranate-seed. I heard it in the music yesterday."

"Why will you insist upon the music?" she cried, impatiently.

"Because you insist on treating me like a stranger," said Trenholm. "You will not even trust me with your first impressions of Tallawara. Come, now, Miss Prescott, stop fencing and tell me how we appear to you."

"Most kind, most hospitable, most genial and courteous," said Helen, cautiously.

"I asked *Miss Prescott*, not Mrs. Thurston."

"Poor Miss Prescott! She is no more!"

"I should tell you how a village in the North impressed me," he said, with an odd change of tone.

"That is the point! you would tell us, and we should listen to you politely. At the bottom of our hearts, however, we shouldn't care, even if you thought ill of us; but if anyone came here and criticised the same things, what would happen? If he were a man, he would very likely be shot. If he were a woman—"

She laughed. "I am not inclined to find out what would happen to him if he were a woman," she said.

"Oh, but then, when you come down here, you always must bear in mind that we are at least fifty years behind the world!"

"It is not easy to accommodate one's self to living fifty years behind the world."

"Especially when one has been accustomed to living fifty years ahead of it," said Trenholm, lowering his voice. "I have never dared speak to you of the loss that all of us suffered—when we lost your father."

"Hush!" said Helen; "that is not safe ground!" But she stretched out her hand to him in acknowledgment of his sympathy. He held it in his a moment, and then bent over and touched her glove with his lips.

Helen turned away her head, drawing her light wrap about her with a shiver. "It is growing chilly," she said. "I must be back by five."

Already the clearness of the sky had begun to thicken. The trees on the horizon were gray-blue with haze, and the sun shone dull and silvery, catching the dry tips of the weeds that grew in patches at the roadside and turning them to a feather spun-glass. There was the faintest tint of rose in the east, and above them, on the top of a hill, the village stood out against it, the court-house dome and the high water-tank seeming to hover above the rest with a curious aërial beauty.

"It is like the village in *Captives*," said Helen, half-smiling. "Tallawara idealized."

"It is the village in *Captives!*"

"Ye-es—*that* is."

"No; Tallawara is! You don't see us as we are; you are blinded by our rags and tatters—accidents we can't help, forced upon us by poverty. We suffer the usual fate of a vanquished country——"

"You know I meant nothing unkind. I didn't know you cared so much."

"Of course I care! Every hope and every aim I have had since I was a child have in some way been connected with that." He waved his whip toward the hill. "No matter what we may say or what we think, the Southerner can never consciously give up his connection with the South; it holds him when he is in it, it drags him back when he is away; and when he is forced to acknowledge that he is forever cut off from it, that moment is one almost of madness. You Northerners have no comprehension of it."

"The things that I have been assured we Northerners have no comprehension of would fill a book," remarked Helen, parenthetically.

"A complete list," retorted Trenholm, "would fill a library! You are a community of citizens, of shopkeepers: we are a community of land-owners. This is not merely my country, it is my land—that *is* mine, by the way—and the land of my fathers, good to hunt over, in the winter; familiar, friendly, firm beneath my tired feet when I turn homeward, my pouch full of game, and my boots spattered thick with a coating of warm, red, friendly clay. The sky is our own sky, superb above as no other sky on earth; the wind blows soft as from some kinder heaven, and the trees up there in the cemetery at the edge of the village, with their

misty, cloudy foliage, wait for me, as they have waited in dusky loveliness for generations of my people; and I feel a great peace at the thought of coming to my last refuge in the shadow of their close-set branches."

"With us the trees seem to live. Even in the bare frost of our Februarys, they aspire; your trees sway forever in steady, despairing patience, mournful and dark, always blocking the horizon, waiting, but without hope."

"What are they waiting for?" Trenholm turned on her in impatient challenge, his right hand resting on his hip, while he leaned forward, allowing the reins in his left to droop negligently between his knees.

"I can't say;"—Helen's eyes followed the landscape dreamily—"it may be for expiation, or for the time of mourning to pass; perhaps for the uneasy giant to awake;"—she waved her hand at the rolling country that surrounded them—"who can tell when the shackles may fall?"

"You don't know us! You don't understand us!"

Helen brought her eyes back to his serenely. "There it is again! I don't want to know you; for me you are a picture, a phantasmagoria; I had as soon insist upon knowing the pieces in a kaleidoscope."

"What do you mean by shackles?"

"The whole world is groaning in bonds of one kind or another—do you claim exception?"

"By heavens, no! But it is not for an onlooker, an outsider, to sit by and tell us of it! You can't treat life as a spectacle, Mrs. Thurston! If you see what you say you see——"

"How should I be able to say, if I had not seen?"

"Then you have no right," cried Trenholm, "to sit by—and—fiddle."

"Nero has always been misunderstood," answered Helen, pensively. "And I—have given up the violin."

"Don't be flippant! You know you can't give up the violin; it has been more than half your life."

"The half I left behind."

The horse suddenly became conscious that they were nearing home, and, starting forward with a jerk, carried the phaëton through the village at a racing pace that seemed to demand all of Trenholm's attention until they reached the gate in front of the Thurstons' home.

"I was sorry to hear that you were expecting to go North again," said Helen, as Trenholm helped her alight.

"When did you hear that?"

"Dr. Rider told me this morning."

"Tell Dr. Rider, the next time you see him, that he is misinformed. I must stay here to see that you come to a proper understanding of the South."

XV

VIBRATIONS

THURSTON was late at Faculty meeting in the afternoon, and when he went in he found Yarnell enlarging upon the necessity of removing the college to the capital.

"Yes, gentlemen, we are all behind the times," he was saying; "we none of us keep in touch with the modern aspects of our profession. I hear from Sam of the wonderful methods which he is studying in the North, and the more I hear the more I feel how greatly we need to be shaken out of the ruts in which we now find ourselves and to be forced to arouse ourselves from the lethargy and indifference into which we are daily falling."

As Thurston sat down, Carpenter gave him a dig in the ribs with his elbow. "One for you," he whispered, in a stage aside.

"Mr. President," said Ellworthy, plaintively.

"Mr. Ellworthy," said the President.

"In desiring to remove us from the sheltered niche in which we find ourselves, I think the gentleman is wrong. I, for one, should greatly deplore and lament the added temptations which our young men would certainly find in the capital of our State. I think that the religious life in Tallawara is one of the chief attrac-

tions to parents who consider confiding to us the sacred responsibility of the immortal souls of these dear sons of theirs."

Thurston squirmed; Carpenter coughed audibly, but made no comment. In the present strained condition of affairs it would hardly do to pose as entirely unregenerate, and Carpenter was very anxious to retain his place.

"I don't see how you can say that, Mr. Ellworthy," said Yarnell, aggressively; "there hasn't been a revival worth two shakes in this town for the last three years."

"Mr. President," repeated Ellworthy, patiently.

"Mr. Ellworthy." The President sometimes found Ellworthy's parliamentary punctilio wearisome.

"I should like to draw the gentleman's attention to the fact that there was a very precious revival last spring, where many souls found salvation and peace of mind."

"I haven't a speck of patience with these weak-kneed revivals, that pan out more backsliders than they do saved!" said Yarnell. "In the last six months there has been more backsliding in Tallawara than there has been before for ten years."

Carpenter moved uneasily; he was of an emotional temperament, and the last spring revival had found him among the converts gathered into the fold. A disquieting rumor had gone abroad that Carpenter was to be numbered in the ranks of the back-slidden; and in Faculty meeting, of late, Yarnell's constant references to this reprehensible spiritual state were obviously pointed at someone present. Whenever it was

Yarnell's turn, in the ordinary rotation of events, to open the proceedings with prayer, he was apt to quote the passage about the castaway; and Carpenter confided angrily to Thurston that on these occasions he always opened one eye and looked at him.

"I think," said Thurston, speaking very slowly, and giving the impression of great patience and fairness, "I think that in this matter of change, Mr. President, the religious issue is essentially outside the question——"

"I regret," put in Yarnell, hastily, "that I have lived to hear sentiments of that kind expressed openly in a Faculty meeting of our time-honored institution."

"I am the last man, Professor Yarnell," said the President, "to belittle the importance of the religious life, but in discussing the propriety of a removal of the college to the capital, a question of that kind ought to have no weight. A good boy will find it as easy to be good in the capital as he will here—" The old gentleman stopped; his line of argument, for the moment, did not seem felicitous. "But a bad boy," he added, recovering himself, "will find it a good deal easier to go to the devil——"

Yarnell shook his head regretfully and clicked slightly with his tongue against the roof of his mouth.

"A good deal easier to go to the *devil*, I said," repeated the President, emphatically, "in the capital than he would here; and I do not see how in regard to that there can be two opinions. I think even brother Yarnell, anxious as he is for the change, must concede that in a town where every other shop is a groggery, where houses of ill-repute abound, frequented by the

corrupt members of one of the most venial Legislatures that has ever been assembled in this State, sir!"—the President brought his fist down upon the table—"I say that the perils that beset a young man in a place of that kind offset tenfold, aye, a hundredfold, the wider interests and the broader social life that we are supposed to find there."

"As for the broader social life," said Thurston, "I think we might well afford to do without it. The society of a small and provincial State capital is not apt to be either improving to youth or amusing to middle age."

"I'm with you there!" chimed in the President, heartily; "we've got our own society here of nice, quiet, respectable men and women; we are used to our own ways and simple refinements, and if you take us out of this pleasant village and set us to trying to vie with those rich real-estate speculators and cotton-brokers, we shall merely lose the good we have, without gaining anything to compensate. When a man has lived all his life in a small town in the country, he is not fitted for the tinsel and glare and brass-band atmosphere of a hot-bed of political corruption!"

"I most sincerely deprecate," said Yarnell, smoothly, "the tone in which my colleagues are pleased to speak of the capital of our State and of the men who are so ably and wisely holding the helm of government. And if it were possible, I should like to have myself recorded as most earnestly protesting against the sentiments that have just been expressed."

"Fudge!" said the President, angrily. But Thurston was silent. It did not need Yarnell's face of glit-

tering satisfaction to show him that both he and his chief had made a mistake.

"Get him to put the question of removal to vote," began Carpenter, eagerly leaning toward Thurston and speaking in a loud whisper. "I don't believe Yarnell 'll find a man in the Faculty-meeting with him if it should come to a question as to whether it were better for our young men to be removed to the capital or to remain where they are. Not a man, sir!" He finished his sentence aloud, looking directly at Yarnell.

"He would have me with him," piped Dr. Evelyn in the high, somewhat hollow voice that age and much practice in the pulpit had imparted to him. "And also," said the Doctor, "I wish to add my word of protest against the sentiments of both the President and Professor Thurston in regard to the Legislature and the society which we should find at the capital! Moreover, I see no necessity upon our being removed to a broader and a more congenial sphere,—I see no necessity, I repeat, of our trying to conduct ourselves in any way unbefitting our means or our incomes. By living in the plain manner to which we are accustomed, and showing the high thought which it is our immortal prerogative to exhibit, I should most heartily and sincerely hope that, through the grace of God, we might set such an example in an unregenerate place——"

"There, now," said Carpenter, disrespectfully, "you're saying that they are unregenerate yourself."

"It is an unregenerate world, my young friend," said the Doctor, unabashed. "A world wherein our mission is, as I said—as I said." The Doctor here

seemed to lose the thread of his discourse, and looked angrily at Carpenter.

"I move we adjourn," said Carpenter, whose habit was to move an adjournment as soon as Dr. Evelyn began to speak.

The Doctor recognized this, and said stiffly, addressing the President, "I believe, sir, that I have the floor?"

"The pulpit he means," whispered Carpenter in a loud aside to Thurston.

"No, sir," said the Doctor, whose hearing was sharp—"the floor."

"I beg your pardon, sir," said Carpenter, most humbly, "but will you not please to continue? I withdraw my motion."

"Mr. President," said Ellworthy; but the President was deaf. "I don't believe he can withdraw a motion to adjourn," continued Ellworthy, hazily. "Not that I wouldn't like to hear what the Doctor has to say. I always like to hear what the Doctor has to say, even——"

"Even when he don't say anything," interrupted Carpenter. Dr. Evelyn rose indignantly and left the room; Carpenter laughed softly to himself.

"Professor Carpenter," said the President, severely, "is your attitude toward Dr. Evelyn the result of a deliberate intention to annoy?"

"Well," said Carpenter, plaintively, "when it comes to preaching, I'm willing to hear the old Doc' on Sunday twice, even three times; an' I'm willing to listen to him at prayer-meeting—in moderation; but I tell you, Mr. President, every time he preaches in Faculty, I'm

going to move to adjourn; and you can just bet—" Carpenter stopped short, conscious that his language was not quite parliamentary. Yarnell shook his head and clicked his tongue again against the roof of his mouth.

"What do you mean by that, sir?" said Carpenter, looking at him fiercely.

"Be still, Carpenter!" said Thurston; and then Carpenter got up and left the room.

Everybody knew that the man had been drinking, and yet not even Yarnell ventured to put it into words.

The President, Thurston, Yarnell, Ellworthy, and the two other members of the Faculty remained awhile in discussion of some necessary business, and then the meeting broke up.

Thurston and the President walked home together.

"Well," said the old gentleman, "I suppose I made a mistake—for that matter, you did, too!—and we've managed, between us, to set the two most important factors in the State capital against us—the legislators and the women."

"I don't think I mentioned the women; I merely made a general remark."

"So much the worse; when general remarks hit, they are apt to make a mighty particular impression; and those women down there would rather be called pernicious than provincial—not that they are not both!" the old gentleman chuckled in an undertone. "So Thurston, we can go home and go to bed to-night with the feeling that if any two men have done their prettiest to get the college removed from Tallawara, we have done it this afternoon."

Thurston went on his way, quite unwilling to agree with the President. He told himself emphatically that he did not see where he had made a mistake; the society of a small State capital was not apt to be improving society; nobody ever did think so; nobody ever would think so. He argued the question with himself till he got to his own door, and kept on arguing it until he sat down to supper.

"What kind of a Faculty meeting did you have?" asked Helen.

"Oh, the usual thing," said Thurston, in discouraged tones; "there was the ordinary discussion of the removal of the college. Yarnell seemed to think that socially, and even morally, it would be a better thing for the boys. If he were more a man of the world, it seems to me that he could not help but perceive that the simplicity and genuineness of Tallawara would make a poor exchange for the meretricious half-and-half society of the capital. Half those people there are *nouveaux riches*, and the other half—may be ladies and gentlemen, I suppose, but they are all extremely narrow, and, to tell the truth, not exactly cultivated people. It seems to me that there is very little to be gained in the way of social advantage by the change."

"That is true," Helen assented, cheerfully, "but it would never do to say so."

"Never do to say so!" repeated Thurston, huffily. "Why not, if it is true?"

Helen looked at him doubtfully a minute. "You do not mean that you have said it?"

"I may not have said just that, but I said something very like it."

"Why did you—" began Helen, and then changed her sentence. "Ah, well, I suppose that whatever is said in Faculty meeting is, in a measure, sacred—and yet, with a man like Mr. Yarnell, I should think a certain amount of caution would be necessary."

"As for caution," said Thurston, ill-humoredly, "I can see no lack of caution in stating a fact so simple. Still, the President did seem to think that any reference to the short-comings of the society in the capital was, in a measure, ill-timed; but that was more because misery likes company; for he went off himself into a diatribe against the Legislature that Yarnell pounced upon at once."

"Between you and the President, you seem to have done your best to alienate the powers that be."

"Criticism is easy, but by no means encouraging or helpful."

"I am sorry if I was discouraging, and I was not meaning to criticise."

"Nevertheless you were doing it, whether you meant to or not."

"Should you feel encouraged if I said that I regarded yours and the President's whole proceedings as models of diplomacy? And would it help you any to have me affirm that Mr. Yarnell was as trustworthy as he is—astute?"

"I think we had better drop the subject; I made a mistake in introducing it."

Helen had come to the table full of good-humor, interest, and amusement; but at this last remark of Thurston's she lapsed into puzzled silence, making the inward comment that as she did not seem able to say

anything pleasing, perhaps she had better not say anything at all. Supper ended, Thurston went and shut himself up in his study and Helen retired to her fire-lit drawing-room.

It was strange, that evening, how easily her mind withdrew from the jarring discord of her home life; it seemed such a little thing to her, such a usual and expected thing. A few weeks ago—a few days ago, even—a scene like this would have hurt and disturbed her; but something had snapped! All she felt now was relief when Thurston went away and left her at liberty to turn her thoughts again to the pictures of the afternoon.

For a time she sat, half-thinking and half-dreaming; then she arose, and going to the corner of the room, turned the key of her violin-case and raised the lid. She had not been on good terms with her music when she had married Thurston; she had given up the violin, perhaps, more definitely than she had anything else; and as she looked down now upon the forsworn instrument, something arose within her so strongly prohibitive that she closed the box quickly and went back to her seat; she was not given to self-analysis, but she felt, dimly and vaguely, that it would be an act of treachery if she gave way to the impulse and longing she felt just then for music.

She had lived for months in a nightmare of depression; not actual suffering, but the dull ache of wounded self and the painful reaching out in the dark for some firm grasp, some stable footing. To-night she breathed anew.

It was not so desperate, after all! Tallawara had its

picturesque side—those wild, rough mounds of earth where the matted, shaggy grass grew almost too tangled to be stirred by the passing breeze, and, underneath, that giant spirit of unrest which lay at the heart of all the life around her. "How well he expressed it!" she murmured, thinking of a composer who had caught the whole, even to the half-savage, half-quaint African melodies which she remembered to have heard, sent back and forth in the night when she came home from the Guthrie Mansion. "The airs were not exactly the same," she said to herself, "and yet—" Absently she turned again to the corner of the room and almost without her own volition the violin nestled lovingly on her shoulder, and, forgetting all questions of either treachery or good faith, she sat playing in front of the fire.

Softly drawing out the tones with her bow, she wandered from one thought to the other, quite away from the worries and frets that daily beset her; her world had taken on a new form and a new color; if she could not make of it what she would, then she must take it as she could. Why struggle any longer against the "different magnetism" that Trenholm called "the spirit of the land"? Already she felt its tremendous moving quality, in the ever-present throb of the emotional that beat and thrilled, like the pulsations of some great subterranean machine, through all the life about her.

The fire died down; she still sat playing almost in whispers to herself. Thurston opened the door and looked in, but could only see the embers in the grate and the dim outlines of his wife's light gown; little

orange gleams, here and there, were reflected from the wood of the violin, and once the diamond quivered white at the end of the moving bow; Helen did not turn her head, and Thurston, who knew that she had heard him, closed the door softly and went away; then Helen played on, far into the night, wrapt like an opium-eater, in a great peace, an ineffable content.

XVI

CONTENTION

ONE morning toward the middle of the following week Helen dressed with unusual care and daintiness and went down to supervise the breakfast, humming softly to herself. The somewhat rude conditions of her domestic staff made it necessary that she should do this; besides it gave her pleasure to add a touch here and there; and, when she had finished, she drew back, admiring her arrangements, hoping that Thurston might notice them, and that the heavy impassibility in which he had formed a habit of taking his meals would be a little relieved.

But Thurston, coming down-stairs late, and even more abstracted than usual, scarcely responded to her cheerful comment on the beauty of the day, and Helen was provoked. She had not said anything very original, but her greeting at least demanded recognition, and she busied herself with the cups and saucers, her color heightened by annoyance. Then, reproaching herself a little at her lack of magnanimity, she made another effort to brighten the gloom.

"Shall we go to the Muhlenbergs' reception this evening?" she asked. "It is the first thing we've been asked to since we have been here."

Thurston had brought a book to the table and pro-

ceeded to read as he ate. There was a fine retributive justice in this which Helen noticed with an inward smile.

"I suppose so," he said, not glancing up.

"What do they wear to their receptions?" asked Helen.

"U-m-m," said Thurston, as if holding on to his idea while he gathered force enough to answer, "the usual thing."

"Will that pale blue and silver brocade of mine do?"

"Of course not!" looking up with annoyance. "I hope you are not going to overdress."

"But if it is an evening party——"

"Oh, very well, do as you choose!" and he went on with his book. Helen tried not to be indignant—it was all so small, she told herself; but what was the matter with him?

"Will everybody be there?" she attempted again.

"I'm sure I can't say; I did not make out the list of invitations," answered Thurston from the depths of his book, in the tone of a man who has buried his head in a pillow.

There were certain traditions of courtesy and good manners that Helen did not propose to forego; she held to them obstinately, as the only species of contradiction and opposition which remained to her; but the red that had mounted to her face burned in two round spots on either cheek, and her eyes were very bright. With an irony that was apparent to no one but herself, she plied Thurston with all the civilities and platitudes she would have offered to the most complete stranger; but he

scarcely answered, and finally he pushed his chair back and left the table.

"I was too much worried to work last night," he said, holding out his book apologetically, "and now I am but half prepared for my first class." He came around the table as he spoke and mechanically kissed her good-by.

Helen held her neck stiffly as the only safeguard against a childish backward jerk, and the rigidity of her backbone did not pass away for fully a minute; then she sighed and shook her head, honestly puzzled. Thurston, as she recollected him, had always been a paragon of good manners and consideration; this absorbed pedant was an entirely undreamed-of development. She assured herself of his affection; and then, with an angry gesture of the hand, repudiated it straightway in favor of the comfort and amenity of a greater courtesy. Hurt and grieved, she went about her morning's work, still retaining enough of the earlier cheer and charm to make time go fast and to carry her forward into the day with a light heart. Toward noon she found it necessary to go down to the village for some of the things that the negroes were always forgetting. The crisp coolness in the air and the beautifying effects of her recent rage still lent fire to her eyes and color to her face, and as she walked from shop to shop, light-footed, swift, and erect, she drew the attention of the loungers in a sort of impersonal but respectful curiosity.

Happily unconscious of this, she started homeward, violating all the proprieties by carrying an armful of bundles.

"I declare," said Johnson, watching her from the window of the apothecary shop, "these Northern women don't seem to value themselves any better than the niggers. Look at the bundles Mrs. Thurston's heaped up. I say, Trenholm," turning toward the back of the store, "there's Mrs. Thurston going along with half the insides of the grocery in her arms. Ain't you going to help her home with 'em?"

Trenholm affected not to hear.

"Perhaps you had rather meet her outside the town," said Johnson, offensively, "or up behind the Mission barn?"

Trenholm started. The other men burst into a chorus of curious questions. "Who has Trenholm been meeting up behind the Mission barn, Johnson? Out with it!"

"Trenholm, you're a sly dog! making appointments with married women behind their husbands' backs!"

"Mighty nice morals they have up there in the North!"

"And what's that you told me, Johnson, about meeting them down on the Prestonpans road, walking up together after dark? My gracious, Trenholm, if you once get Thurston after you, your life isn't worth two bits!"

At this there was a general roar of laughter. "Thurston's a fire-eater; he is, sure 'nuff!" drawled the same speaker, urged on by success.

Trenholm strode from the back of the store; he stood and looked them over one after the other. "I cannot permit this for one instant," he said, slowly.

"Lordy! if he isn't talking Northern and fine!"

"Pehmit!" And the speaker doubled himself back and forth in spasms of amusement.

"I mean what I say," said Trenholm. "I will not permit the use of any woman's name in this injurious connection with mine. I have never had a secret appointment of any kind with any married woman in Tallawara."

"Oh, come now, Trenholm," said Johnson, aggressively, "we're not going to be taken in by any bluff like that! There are too many of us that were here when you were home four years ago; and that fight of yours with Trescott hasn't quite died out of the memory of man yet."

Trenholm flushed; his reputation was against him, and he felt bitterly chagrined at the network into which Helen had been drawn.

"You all know mighty well," he said, relapsing into a more familiar accent, "that Ned Trescott was a jealous fiend, and that Mrs. Trescott was entirely without blame; answer me!" he insisted; "don't you?"

"Yes, we do, Trenholm," said one of the men, "and it wasn't fair to bring it up, either, because the whole thing was more of a trick on your part to torment Trescott than anything else."

"Then I put it to you whether it is fair for you to allow that to prejudice you? I assure you, on my word of honor as a gentleman, that since I have been down here this time I have never made any appointment with anyone that was not open and above—" He suddenly stopped; he had forgotten Miriam Long.

"It looks queer," said Johnson, taking advantage of Trenholm's hesitation; "it looks mighty queer

when you see a man driving down a deep gully in the mud, where nobody thinks of going, if he can help it, and then see a lady coming along, kind of slow and uncertain, until she meets this man, when he jumps out and puts her in the buggy and they go off together —happy as two doves."

"I drove that lady straight home," said Trenholm. "She got out at her own door, went in, and told her husband where she was going."

"Oh, you can tell us that!" sneered Johnson.

"You can ask Thurston, any of you," said Trenholm, angrily.

"You're safe enough there," said Johnson. "Who's going to ask him that? But you can't deny, Trenholm, that I met you after dark down on the Prestonpans road."

"That was an accident," said Trenholm, trying to restrain his temper.

"Mighty convenient accident," sneered Johnson; "kind of prearranged accident!"

Trenholm walked slowly toward Johnson from the back of the store, his anger betraying itself in an increasing calm at every step. "Take that back!" he said softly, coming to a standstill.

"No, sir," said Johnson, beginning to bluster, "I ain't going to take back what my eyes have seen twice; no, three times! You met that woman on the Prestonpans road after dark; you were waiting for her behind the Longs' barn yesterday afternoon; and, what is worse, last Friday afternoon you made a rendezvous of your own mother's church."

"You infernal liar!" cried Trenholm; and striking from the shoulder, he sent Johnson rolling among the

bottles and perfumes of the show-window; then, leaving the shop, he walked rapidly down the sidewalk, caught up with Helen, and, relieving her of her packages, turned homeward with her, talking idle nothings, of the morning, the temperature, and the blue of the sky. He was breathing deeply, as if somewhat out of breath; but there was no other trace of excitement in his manner.

"How shall you spend the rest of the day?" he said, when they reached the bridge across the "Branch."

"Oh, as usual; life flows so tranquilly here that one hardly sees the difference between one day and another; nothing ever happens in Tallawara. I stay at home, or I go out—sometimes to drive, oftener to walk; but aside from our goings out and our comings in, there is nothing left to chronicle."

Trenholm raised his eyes and saw, at the turn of the road beyond the Thurstons' grounds, Johnson standing and waiting for him; he put his hand behind him and felt in his hip-pocket. To Helen this search merely meant the catastrophe of a forgotten handkerchief. She turned her head to one side, commenting upon the curious bark of a China-berry tree, and so did not see Johnson slowly level a pistol at Trenholm; that instant a couple of breathless men darted from behind the thicket of bushes that grew at the corner and drew Johnson back out of sight—Trenholm laughed.

"No," he said, "nothing happens! But I wonder if it would surprise you to know how often we are on the verge of it. I think I could count you without hesitation six men in this place who always go about armed, in hourly expectation of a fight."

"Six men, who any day might shoot each other? Why, that is murder!"

"Yes, six; I think there may even be eight—now." Trenholm laughed again, softly.

"Why eight?" She had at last penetrated something unusual.

"Because I have just had the pleasure of witnessing the addition of two new recruits."

"You are one of them?"

"I didn't say that."

"But I see it! You were out of breath when you met me; there is a sort of tension in your manner now; something disagreeable has happened!"

"My dear madam, let me assure you that nothing ever happens in Tallawara!" They had climbed the hill and Trenholm stopped at the Thurstons' gate; Helen took her bundles from him and unconsciously handed them over to a little colored boy who stood near by.

"Take these into the house, Lincoln," she said.

Lincoln took the packages but remained standing, gazing with a sort of fascination at Trenholm, who lifted his hat and turned away. Lincoln proceeded to put the parcels all down in the path and stole after him.

"Lincoln," said Helen in a low voice, "come back here."

"My sakes, Mis' Helen!" whined Lincoln, still proceeding cautiously in Trenholm's wake. "I jus' hatto go down de road. Mars' Gus Johnson's waitin' at de corneh; he gwine shoot Mars' Jim as soon as eveh he gets a chance at him! I done missed de las' shootin' but I ain't gwine mis' dis heah nohow!"

XVII

THE RECEPTION

HELEN waited for one moment of sickening terror to hear the shots; then, none coming, she ran to Thurston's study; he looked up from his writing with a puzzled frown at the intrusion. "What is the matter?" he asked.

"There is something wrong," she said, breathing quickly and speaking in a high voice that sounded so strangely to herself that she lowered her tone as she continued: "Lincoln says that Johnson man is waiting to shoot Mr. Trenholm as he passes at the corner of the road."

"These people are always proposing to shoot each other," said Thurston, incredulously.

"Are you not going out to stop it?—Shall you do nothing?"

Thurston looked up at her as one does at an importunate child. "Do? What can I do? If they had honestly intended to shoot they would have done it long ago, but as no shots have been heard it is probable that they have changed their minds."

Helen ran from the room, leaving the door open behind her. Thurston deliberately shut it and then returned to his work, which was not interesting; he was conscious of a distaste and weariness with everything

he did, conscious, too, in a dull, vague way, of his own shortcomings; but he told himself that the perfect comprehension and wide charity of an ideal affection was a sufficient cloak for a multitude of minor sins and omissions. "I am very busy and she will understand," he thought to himself; "there can be no shadow of misconception where true love and wifely sympathy hold their beneficent sway!"

Only half-reassured, Helen hurried up-stairs to an upper window, from whence she could look out toward the cross-road. No one was there. After waiting a minute she saw Trenholm pass the clump of bushes at the corner, lounge carelessly down the street and walk homeward toward his own place.

No pistol shot disturbed the quiet calm of the morning, grown warm with a sort of spring-like mildness in the noonday sun.

Making some internal comment not quite complimentary to the sensational Lincoln, Helen went downstairs, and upon opening the front door found that young person sitting dejectedly on the steps of the porch, the bundles still lying untouched in the middle of the pathway. "Lincoln," she said, severely, "what did you mean by telling me a story like that?"

"'Tain't no story," said Lincoln; "I seed Mars' Gus Johnson raise he pistol de minute you and Mars' Jim come up de hill. Mars' Jim put his hand behine him fo' his own pistol; you *mus'* a seen him do it, Mis' Helen!"

"I don't believe he carries a pistol."

"Dey all does, Mis' Helen; dey ain't no gen'lemen in Tallawara what don't have a pistol; least no young

gen'lemen. The Professah, he don't carry none, neither does de Judge, but all dese heah young uns dey goes ahm'd. I wish I had a pistol, I'd shoot, *I* would!" There was a world of scorn and reprobation in this last statement. Lincoln felt defrauded; again the luck was against him.

"It is well, then, that you haven't a pistol. Now pick up those bundles and bring them into the house."

"I done run so fas' to de fight dat I don't feel no strength. My laigs is all gave out." He got up, bowed in imitation of old Uncle Louis, who was his grandfather, and, picking up the bundles, hobbled into the house.

That night at the Muhlenbergs' party there was no lack of interest and excitement in the conversation; the rooms buzzed with whispered comment and speculation; but very little was known in regard to the affair at the apothecary's. The men who gathered in the shops on the main street of Tallawara were governed by an unwritten code; they gossiped, they gambled, they drank and occasionally they quarrelled, but their doings among themselves were supposed to be confidential. In particular, those who congregated at the "drug-store" might be said to form the most aristocratic and exclusive club in the town, and it was not considered decorous to divulge either the club events or the club scandals to the public; any infringement of this rule was always blamed on some married man—or on Brinton, who insisted on being a law unto himself.

When Helen and Thurston entered the room there was a little hush of expectancy and interest. In spite

of Thurston's objections she had worn the pale-blue and silver gown, and stood resplendent, thrown into prominence by the universal black silk that always appeared at Tallawara festivities. As she glanced about she became aware that she was one of the few people there who were without a bonnet, and that Thurston and Trenholm were the only men in the room who wore evening dress.

"I do hope you didn't expect you were coming to a ball, Mrs. Thurston," said Mrs. Muhlenberg anxiously, as she shook hands with her. "I tried to put 'reception' on all the cards, and if I didn't put it on yours, I'm sure I apologize. I wouldn't have anything happen to make you uncomfortable for worlds."

"I sha'n't be at all disappointed if there is no dancing," said Helen. "I haven't danced for two years."

Mrs. Muhlenberg looked sincerely puzzled. Reception, to her mind, carried a distinct mandate for a bonnet and coat. "I hope you'll have a good time," she said, somewhat dubiously; "of course you must find our society very inferior when you compare it with the brilliant and intellectual gatherings to which you are accustomed in the North."

"But I am not accustomed to brilliant gatherings," said Helen, smiling at Brinton, who had stopped to listen.

"And I'm sure you don't act as if you were!" said Mrs. Muhlenberg, cordially, as she moved away in the direction of a group of fresh arrivals.

Brinton came a step nearer and bent over Helen solicitously. "How are you feeling after that, Mrs. Thurston?"

" It was a genuine compliment."

" Do you know, ma'am, I've about come to the conclusion that you are a mighty sensible lady?"

Helen made no answer. She was smiling at Zoë Mason, who nodded back to her familiarly from the other side of the room, where she was surrounded by her usual court of college boys.

" She's looking mighty fine to-night!" said Brinton, his eyes fixed on Zoë, who wore an enormous black velvet hat with a forest of drooping plumes. Her dress was a delicate gray in color, cut somewhat low in the neck, a " V-body " she called it herself; a great bunch of yellow roses was fastened at her belt, and she carried another in her hand.

" She is very handsome."

" Most as fine as a picture in the back of a magazine."

Helen glanced at him rapidly to discover what meaning his words might be intended to convey; but Brinton was imperturbable.

" I'm making a collection of actresses and society ladies; I tell Miss Zoë I'm going to leave them to her in my will, but I declare she ought to have them now, for five out of ten might be taken for her picture. Those people are better than fashion-plates for our girls down here," he added, thoughtfully. " They are so mighty improving, too!"

Helen was quite helpless; it was impossible to discover whether Brinton was in jest or earnest. " Do you like the pictures in the backs of the magazines?" she asked.

" Well, I don't know whether I do or not; I suppose

they're all right, or they wouldn't be there." His grave face broke suddenly into a broad smile at Helen's bewilderment. "I reckon you and I agree about that too, Mrs. Thurston," he said; "don't you?"

"I think we do, but that doesn't prevent Zoë Mason from looking enchanting."

"What'll you give me if I tell her so?"

"The satisfaction of speaking to her!"

"There's no denying that that would be a sure-enough satisfaction, ma'am; but at the same time I've got something mighty important to say to Miss Zoë, and if you'll let me use your name I'd be much obliged; besides, it seems to me she's having more veal just now than is good for her." Without waiting for an explicit permission he crossed the room, scattering Zoë's youthful attendants as a big boat does a group of skiffs.

"I don't believe she wants me at all!" Helen heard Zoë's clear voice in answer to Brinton's request. "Did she say 'now'?"

"Yes; right off, too."

"I hope, Mrs. Thurston," said Yarnell, coming up with his wife and making Helen a low bow, "that you are enjoying as good health as your appearance indicates."

Brinton, who with Zoë had started across the room, made a face at Yarnell's back, and the two turned away.

"I notice that you are casting admiring glances at our Tallawara belle," said Yarnell, turning to follow the direction of Helen's glance. "I told Miss Zoë earlier in the evening that she ought to have her picture painted."

"She is very paintable," said Helen, absently.

"So she seems to think," snapped Mrs. Yarnell, who kept her little gloved hand tightly hooked in her husband's arm, "and I wish she didn't, too. Don't you think it is an awful shame, Mrs. Thurston, the way our girls down here paint?"

"Miss Mason has a charming complexion. I had not noticed that she painted."

"Now I think that's queer," said Yarnell, "and you an artist."

"But I am not an artist."

"Why, I heard," said Mrs. Yarnell, "that someone saw you painting with that Miss Long lately."

"Miss Long was teaching me to sketch," said Helen. "She is very attractive, too; have you never met her?"

Mrs. Yarnell stiffened perceptibly. "I reckon you don't understand things down here, Mrs. Thurston, or you never would ask that. I don't mean anything unkind to Miss Long, who may be a very respectable girl in her own walk of life, and of course we don't expect you Northern people to see these little social shades that are so plain to us; but those people out at the Mission are not what *we* would call ladies and gentlemen. Up North I reckon you all are more democratic, and I'm sure I think it's a good deal more Christian! But down here we are made how we are made, and it would just be flying in the face of Providence for us to try to be different."

"Mis' Yarnell's right, Mrs. Thurston," said Yarnell, speaking very loud; "anyone that wants to be one of us must give up those people at the Mission;

in your friendship with Miss Long you unconsciously criticise our social usages, just as your husband has been criticising our State institutions. I'm giving you a friendly word of warning, and you mustn't take offence. Shall we go out to supper?" And having attracted the attention of everybody in the room he offered Helen one arm and Mrs. Yarnell the other, and they proceeded through the hall toward the dining-room.

"My gracious," said Mrs. Yarnell, suddenly, "if there isn't Gus Johnson!"

Helen started. "Where?"

"He's coming right in at the door. I do hope someone'll manage to get Jim Trenholm out of the way! Do you know what Jim and Gus quarrelled about, Mrs. Thurston?"

Helen shook her head. "All I have heard was some improbable tale of Lincoln's."

"That Lincoln's a good-for-nothing nigger," interrupted Mrs. Yarnell, "but—what did he tell you?"

"Something about Mr. Johnson's standing at our corner waiting to shoot Mr. Trenholm as he came up the hill."

"Well, it's true,—only he wasn't waiting. You know Jim just knocked him into the show-window down at the drug-store, and then came out and walked home with you. But Gus went tearing up the street the other way and got to the corner just as you and Jim came along. I tell you, Mis' Thurston, I think you showed awful presence of mind never to notice anything when you saw Jim reach for his pistol."

"But I never saw anything of the kind!"

"When Jim put his hand to his hip-pocket, do you mean to say you never suspected anything?"

"How was I to know that he had a pistol there?"

"But where else could he carry his pistol?" insisted Mrs. Yarnell. "Where do your men up North carry their pistols?"

"They never carry them."

"Ah, yes they do! You needn't tell me!"

"Perhaps they may," said Helen, politely. "My father never did, I know, nor any of my cousins."

"Northern men are mighty sly and reticent," commented Mrs. Yarnell. "You can never tell what they are up to. Why, since he's lived up with you all, I declare I don't know Jim Trenholm! He's got to be as close-mouthed as if he'd been born there. I asked him to-night what he and Gus Johnson had been quarrelling over, and he said it was about the best way to cook 'possum; Gus wanted it roasted and he wanted it baked! Now do you believe that, ma'am?"

Helen had scarcely listened to Mrs. Yarnell's talk in her anxiety as to the outcome of the meeting between Johnson and Trenholm; but before long a whisper went around the room, passing from one to another with incredible rapidity, that Trenholm had left the house immediately before Johnson arrived. Everyone drew a long breath of relief. "Not that any Southern gentleman," said Mrs. Yarnell, "would be so impolite as to shoot another gentleman right here in Mrs. Muhlenberg's new house!"

XVIII

A FREE LECTURE

A FEW minutes before Johnson had arrived a breathless boy had rushed up to the Muhlenbergs' front door and delivered a message for Brinton, who made a sign to Zoë Mason imperceptible to everyone else. With a little cry Zoë suddenly reeled against Trenholm, who was standing near her, and caught his arm as if for support. "I'm awfully sorry, Jim," she said, "but you've got to take me home. The smell of fresh varnish in this new house is more than I can bear. We'll just go out through the back door and take the short cut to our house." She was very pale and seemed a little shaken, but as they crossed the lot Trenholm wondered at the strength and celerity of her pace.

"You've made a nice fool of yourself," she said, suddenly, when they had reached the smoother road; "you've made a nice fool of yourself, getting into a row with Gus Johnson at the drug-store; how under the sun you contrived to bring Mrs. Thurston into it, too, I can't see. I think you might have picked out somebody a little better acquainted with our ways than Mrs. Thurston. How's she to know that it ain't the custom for young married women to go out buggy-riding with other men? I reckon they do it all the time in the North."

"Are you feeling less faint?" inquired Trenholm, solicitously.

"I'm not faint at all—I never was faint."

"Then I may flatter myself that you brought me out here for the simple purpose of lecturing me?"

"No, I had another reason that I'm not going to explain until I'm good and ready; the lecture's thrown in—free, gratis."

"I suppose Brinton has been telling you about the row this morning."

"There are other people in this world besides Mr. Brinton," said Zoë, haughtily.

"It makes no difference how you heard it, but you ought to have known that Mrs. Thurston would never make an appointment to meet me in secret, even if I were to ask her."

"Oh, pooh, I'm not such a fool as to believe that! Why, even Mr. B——, the person who told me, knew better than that! The question is what you all were up to, waiting an hour and a half back there behind Mr. Long's barn?"

"At any rate, I wasn't waiting for Mrs. Thurston!"

"Then who were you waiting for? And, if she'd promised to come, what did she change her mind for?"

"I tell you, nobody promised to come!"

"Oh—she hadn't promised to come! Then you thought she'd change her mind, but she didn't! I'm glad Miss Long has so much sense."

"How you jump at things!" answered Trenholm, angrily.

Zoë laughed. "I reckon it's just as good a way to get at them as any other!" she said, triumphantly.

"If I had asked Miss Long to drive with me——"

"It would have been a mighty mean trick," interjected Zoë.

"I don't understand you!"

"Yes, you do. You know well enough that you can't go about with that girl the way you would with one of us. Why don't you let her alone? There are plenty of girls for you to take buggy-riding without picking out the only one in town that would be hurt by it."

"You are allowing your imagination to run away with you."

"Well, you can't say it ain't running in the right direction!" retorted Zoë, defiantly. "And what's more, I don't see how you can do it. I should think you'd have more pride than to disgrace yourself by associating with those people at the Mission."

Trenholm was stung. The prejudices of Tallawara formed an integral part of his mental equipment. "I am not associating with the people at the Mission!" he said.

"You are, too! You meet that Miss Long at Miss Locke's nearly every day."

"Would you like me to ask Miss Locke to tell her to stop coming there?"

"It's none of my business. You can go out and preach at the colored church if you want to; I shouldn't be surprised if you had done it already!" They had reached General Mason's gate; Trenholm opened it, and Zoë stalked in in front of him; he followed her, but when she came to the door she opened it and shut it in his face without a good-night.

That Zoë had shut the door in his face was not significant, she had done it often before, and Trenholm stood a moment, dimly conscious that she was waiting inside, half expectant of his forcing the citadel; then, overcome by his strong reluctance to renew the subject of dispute, he turned and walked slowly through the village streets toward home.

"S-s-s-s-t!" A low voice came from the shrubbery near his own gate. Trenholm stood still, his hand mechanically seeking his hip, and a faint dismay coming to him as he discovered that he had not his pistol with him.

"Boss," said a voice, apologetically, "it's Hannibal."

"All right, Hannibal, come out. What is the matter?"

Hannibal shambled forth; there were no lamps at that end of the town, and the starlight scarcely left one object distinguishable from another. The negro stopped a few paces from Trenholm and straightened himself, showing his enormous height, a gigantic shadow in the surrounding dark. "Mist' Trenholm," Hannibal made an unusual effort to be formal, "he's been at my house dis evenin'."

"Who?"

"Johnson. He came 'bout seven; leastways, I think it mus' a' been seven. I was a-sittin' in de house with Evidences when Ailsa, she open de do' wid a bang an' stood dere; de minute I laid eyes on her I knowed who was outside."

"Are you sure it was Johnson?"

"Ailsa done made me sure mighty quick. 'Here

you, niggah,' she says, 'take dose two shirts of Mars' Gus Johnson's an' put 'em in de washtub to steep.' I didn't move one step; an' Ailsa she jus' stood an' smiled. It's de white blood in her, Mars' Jim; when ever Ailsa see dat Johnson it jus' hop up an' answer!"

The two men faced each other in silence. Trenholm's breath came quickly; he saw, in this open visit of Johnson's, a direct defiance of himself.

"Mars' Jim," whined Hannibal, "you gwine to lem —me finish him dish heah time, ain't you? I tell you, she neber look like dat, fo' me!"

"If I warn him off——"

"You done did dat once."

"And he stayed away."

"He's back now."

It was unanswerable. Trenholm was puzzled. "Why don't you speak to Ailsa yourself?" he suggested.

"I tell you, I cain't, Mars' Jim. I speak to Ailsa 'bout some things an' I make her listen, too! But dish yere don't b'long. When she stand up befo' me, lookin' like you in petticoats, she downs me; she downs me every time. I could kill her, easy; but I cain't ordeh her 'round."

"Tell her to come up to me to-morrow morning," said Trenholm.

"She won't come."

"If she doesn't, I'll fetch her. Good-night."

XIX

CONSEQUENCES

THE next morning, like a procession with music and banners, Ailsa, in gala attire, paraded the main street of Tallawara, and turned up the west road on her way to Trenholm's; a bright red spot burned under the dusky coloring of either cheek, and she swung along as if treading an inch or two above the solid earth. Arrived at Trenholm's porch she picked up the heavy bell that stood there, and rang an alarm that brought old Louis scuttling to the door.

"Mars' Jim waitin' fo' you, Ailsa," he said, calmly; "but, if you gwine snort dat-a-way when you gits in, you bettah tuh'n back wha you came from; I ain't gwine tolerate no rampageousness in de library."

"Lemme by, niggah!" said Ailsa. "I'se quality to-day."

"No, you isn't," said Louis, judicially, "you is pure black, you is; you mammy's stickin' out all ober you dis mawnin'. G'won roun' by de back do'."

For reply she swept him aside like a wisp of straw, and strode into Trenholm's study.

Trenholm looked up; Ailsa quailed a little at his impersonal scrutiny and the awe with which these surroundings always inspired her. "I'se heah!" she said, holding her head up and smiling defiantly, while her

eyes glittered down through her long, half-closed lashes.

"I see you; but for all the good it is going to do you I think you might as well have stayed away. You know very well that there's no use in talking to you when you come in a temper like this. I sent for a reasonable woman, not for some raging negro wench off the streets."

This repetition of the same note by master and man was not without its effect; Ailsa had a passionate pride in the disgrace of her white blood. "What do you want with me?" she said, dropping in a measure her dialect.

"I want to warn you that I'm not going to stand any repetition of the affair of ten years ago."

"What business is it of yours, I'd like to know? I ain't nothin' to you and you ain't nothin' to me, an' I don't thank you fo' interferin' in my affairs."

"I promised my father that, no matter what happened, I would look out for you; it was his last request; I've got to interfere."

"You promised de Gen'ral? His las' reques'? My God, de old Gen'ral didn't made no las' reques'es!"

"He was going to send you to my mother's cousins in the North; he left here that morning and went down to the plantation to meet you——"

"Who says he met me! You knows wha' I was dat time!" Ailsa interrupted angrily, on the defensive.

"I know where it was said you were!"

"It was *proved* I was!" shouted Ailsa.

"Be still!" said Trenholm.

There was a short silence in the room. Trenholm

was looking at the woman steadily; she moved under his gaze uneasily and tossed her head.

"What I want you for now is to tell you that you are not to go there again?"

"Not to go wha' again?"

"To the Guthrie mansion. Do you hear me? You have been there lately; once, to my certain knowledge. You're not to do it again."

"Who gwine stop me?"

"I am—and Hannibal."

Ailsa placed her hands upon her hips and laughed long and loud. "Hannibal!" she repeated at intervals scornfully, "Hannibal! I reckon I can manage Hannibal!"

"You may manage Hannibal, but you can't manage me! And this affair must be brought to an end. Either you'll send off Johnson yourself or I'll do it for you!"

"Humph! you-all da'sn't face Gus Johnson! Yes-t'day mawnin' you hid from him behine Mis' Thurston's petticoats; an' las' night, when he come to de Muhlenbergs' party, you jes' ran off; got Miss Zoë to take care ob you dat time. Mighty much sendin' Gus Johnson you'll do!"

Trenholm at the study-table grew green with anger. "Who said that?" he whispered. "Johnson?"

Ailsa was cowed, but not by his words. "He ain't said nothin' 'bout it,—cross my hea't, he ain't! I ain't seed him 'cept when he brung dose shirts."

"Who told you?"

"Hannibal."

"I don't believe it."

"Well, he did tell me," repeated Ailsa. "He said Gus Johnson met you all with Mis' Thurston yest'day, and Miss Zoë done cah'y you off las' night."

"I see; there is a difference between Hannibal's telling it to you and the way you gave it to me?"

"I reckon I gave it to you 'bout right," said Ailsa, with sturdy impudence.

Trenholm sprang to his feet so suddenly that the woman cowered instinctively, shielding her head with her arm, and moving backward toward the door, with a sidling, frightened motion.

"Go!—Go quickly!" said Trenholm, breathlessly.

Opening the door with her other hand, Ailsa withdrew, still facing him. "My Lawd!" she ejaculated softly as she left the house. "If I'd once tuh'ned my back I'd a hatto been brung out in piezes, sho' 'nuff!"

Trenholm sat at his table, shaking with nervous reaction. He had played with Ailsa as a child; together they had fished, and climbed trees, almost like two boys. He had even taught her to fire a gun, and she was no mean huntress; but while he neither by word nor look acknowledged her relationship, as she grew up, he could never become accustomed to the disgrace of her half-concealed immorality, nor could he rid himself of a feeling of responsibility for her welfare and of mortification at her degradation.

With the gesture of one who, once for all, puts aside an unpleasant subject, he pushed away his papers and went up the road to Miss Locke's.

"Well?" she said coldly, as he entered the room.

"You have heard about the recent events, I see,"

said Trenholm, throwing himself into an easy-chair before the fire and clasping one knee in his hands.

"The recent events don't concern me; I am quite out of sympathy with that side of your character. Still, I had hoped that, in a measure—only in a measure—you might have become civilized; it was expecting too much. More than one generation go——"

"To make a gentleman?"

"No; to learn self-control! Your people apparently have never had even the most rudimentary knowledge of it!"

She spoke with genuine ill-humor. Trenholm looked up at her as she stood warming one foot on the fender, and smiled.

"You needn't try that!" she said, visibly softened. "In spite of your charming ways you are a savage, and you sometimes behave like one."

"What have I done?"

"For one thing, you knocked Guthrie Johnson into Muhlenberg's show-window yesterday."

"Johnson has been spoiling to be knocked down for weeks; at the time I seemed divinely appointed!"

"I wish you would leave Tallawara!"

"So does Dr. Rider."

"I can't see what he has to do with it!" Miss Locke was a little jealous of Dr. Rider.

"I can't see what anyone has to do with it. A man, generally, is allowed to live in his own home in peace."

"That is all nonsense; no Southerner who has been as long in the North as you have can be comfortable down here."

"You seem to have solved the problem very satisfactorily for yourself."

"We Northerners can do without things."

"You have certainly provided us Southerners with every facility for acquiring the same noble accomplishment!" Trenholm spoke almost sharply.

"You don't know how to do without."

Trenholm smiled in a superior manner.

"You substitute something else and call it just as good," added Miss Locke.

"That is not a defect."

"It is a very objectionable quality."

"If you feel this way about us why don't you leave, yourself?"

"I am always leaving—next week. It is the only thing that makes staying possible—that and a sort of horrid attraction that the South has always had for me!" She conceded this last reluctantly.

"If that is your experience, what must the attraction be to a Southerner?"

"A bad habit that ought to be overcome like any other," said Miss Locke, flippantly.

Trenholm's jaw set. "It is a habit I have no intention of changing," he said.

"You will be compelled to change it if you marry. What woman that you could care for would be willing to settle down for life in this horrible, illiterate, immoral, brutal, hideous village?"

"What a frightful way you are in this morning!" Trenholm's voice was light, but his cheek flushed and his eyes glittered.

"You are merely evading my question."

"All I can say is that one woman whom I came mighty near caring a great deal for is living here now, and I'll tell you another thing—if my descendants are not to live here in this very 'horrible, illiterate, immoral, brutal, hideous village,' as you so politely call the home of my ancestors, I'd rather cut off the old race and end it once for all. A Northern Trenholm, with Northern ideals, Northern habits, and, above all," he added, viciously, "a Northern accent, is a sacrilege."

"Then so far as I can see the sooner you marry Zoë Mason and be done with it the better."

"It is very doubtful as to whether Miss Zoë would have me. She shut the door in my face last night."

"Did you ask her to open it again?"

"No."

"That's just the point," said Miss Locke, dryly. "You never will ask her! And the first thing you know Brinton will step in and carry her off, just as —Thurston did the other."

"Very well then, I shall have to turn my attention to—Miss Long." He looked at her defiantly.

"You have no right to mention Miss Long in that connection, but since you have I will repeat what I said: *I wish you would leave Tallawara!* Isn't that poor child's life wretched enough in this intolerably vindictive, narrow-minded——"

"Spare me a repetition! The admirably just and temperate opinion of Tallawara that you have already expressed is sufficient."

"Do you mean to say it is unjust?"

"You said we were immoral."

"How about your politics?"

"Political immorality is forced upon us; there, we are not to blame; but in other directions—I thank God our record is clean. There isn't a woman in this place that the most carping critic could cast a stone at."

"How about your men? And do you mean white women—or—black?"

"That's not a subject upon which I care to enter, but I will just mention that a Southern woman would hardly know that such a state of affairs existed, still less would she allude to it."

"Humph!" said Miss Locke, "they can't help but know. Moreover—it's a state of affairs that cost your father his life."

Trenholm looked her steadily in the eyes and did not answer.

"You know that it was."

"What do you know?" he asked, cautiously.

"I know that murder proceeded from a quarrel very much like yours of yesterday."

"My father struck Johnson in the face the day before he was killed—I see no further likeness."

"The consequences will be the same."

Trenholm hesitated a long time, half closing his eyes with the calculating air of a man with difficulty making up his mind. "Do you believe that Gus Johnson killed my father?"

"Everybody knows it was he." There was another long pause.

"It is not true."

"But—you? You believed it—once."

"I have known that I was mistaken for ten years."

"Then why didn't you tell me?"

"Because I thought it wiser not."

Miss Locke looked like a person who had received a blow. Her face crimsoned and then paled. "You mean that you wouldn't trust me—*me?*"

"It is not you I mistrust," said Trenholm, quickly; "it is your principles, your scruples."

"And you've allowed an innocent man to rest under that stigma all this time?"

"I never said that Johnson was innocent."

"It's outrageous! You have no right to withhold the truth another hour!"

"Ah! What did I tell you? There goes your New England conscience!"

"You are quite wrong," expostulated Miss Locke; "there is no morbid conscientiousness about me. I lie with ease and success, and I am never sorry when I have done it; I am completely Southernized."

"Southerners never lie! The truth was invented by a Virginian; one of those obvious inventions that only Genius can accomplish."

"Pooh! George Washington—You needn't try to draw me off in this way——"

"I'm not trying to draw you, but your conscience—your rabid, voracious, investigating conscience. If you once get into the alternate chills and fever of a real attack, nothing will be safe. Family, friends, parents, all would go down before it; the most sacred confidences would be thrown to the winds and the most dangerous breaches of trust would stalk out through the open doorway!"

To Trenholm's intense surprise Miss Locke stood in

front of him a moment, her face working painfully, and then she turned and hastily left the room.

"I had to do it," he thought to himself; "if she once took the idea of whitewashing Johnson nothing would prevent her giving the whole matter to the public again." He waited a few minutes hoping that she would reappear, and was about to leave the house, when Miriam Long came into the room.

"Why have you been quarrelling with Miss Locke?" she asked, indignantly.

"Because Miss Locke began quarrelling with me."

"What have you said to her?"

"I merely gave her a warning that she chose to take in ill part."

"She is not angry; she is hurt."

"Women are always being hurt."

"They would never be hurt if there were no men, and the worst of it is, that the men they care for most hurt them the most cruelly."

"Have I ever hurt you?" asked Trenholm, softly, looking into the fire and studiously divesting his countenance of expression.

"Hurt me!" she said, passionately. "Of course you have not hurt me any more than you have others, but it is impossible to know you without being hurt by you!"

Trenholm's face softened; he stepped toward her, impulsively stretching out his hands.

"You are a selfish man," continued Miriam, her mind still occupied with the wrongs of Miss Locke. "So long as you get what you want you are charmingly amiable; but if you are refused or disappointed, or

even crossed in the smallest project, you cease to think of anyone but yourself, and how the opposition affects you."

"This is extremely interesting," said Trenholm, offering her a chair. "How much careful thought and discriminating study you must have given my character!"

"It requires neither thought nor study to understand your character," said Miriam, sitting down provisionally on the edge of the chair; "all one needs is to look about and see the effect of your actions."

"And you have looked about? May I inquire what you have seen?"

"I have seen to-day, for example, when you wilfully wounded the one person in the world who cares for you most!"

"Myself?" inquired Trenholm, sweetly.

"No—Miss Locke. Impossible, as it may seem, she cares more for you than you do for yourself. She cares whether you are good or bad, selfish or sacrificing, fine or ignoble; it hurts her when you are conceited, worldly, vain."

"Vain!" echoed Trenholm. It took this last small arrow to pierce the joints of his armor. "Vain!"

"Yes, vain, and untrustworthy, and—and treacherous!"

Trenholm's mind flew to the gossip with which Tallawara was just then seething. "What do you mean?" he demanded, brusquely dropping his playful tone. "Who has been talking to you?"

"No one has talked; I have seen for myself!"

Trenholm all at once seemed to withdraw into a

shell of politeness and distant courtesy. He looked taller than usual; she felt that she scarcely knew him, and suddenly bethought herself that he was a celebrated author.

"I beg your pardon!" She rose from her chair.

"No—you can't go without an explanation now. In what do you find me untrustworthy, and—and treacherous?" He imitated her previous hesitation.

"I think," she faltered, "that a man who has been spoiled as much as you have is hardly ever trustworthy."

"You have said already that I was vain—why repeat?"

"Because you ask me to," flashed Miriam.

"Then I ask you, also, to cite some particular instance wherein you have found me treacherous?"

Miriam flushed. "You have no right to question me!"

"I have a right to know what I am accused of. When was I treacherous?"

The girl's face was scarlet, and her eyes were fixed on the open window.

"Will you please look at me?"

She turned slowly toward him and painfully lifted her eyes.

"That is better. Now, be kind enough to tell me when I was treacherous."

The color ebbed from Miriam's face and left it quite white. "Last Saturday," she said.

"Because I asked you to drive with me!"

"No, because you took Mrs. Thurston, as you did."

"Then someone *has* talked."

She shook her head impatiently. "I saw you."

"You saw me! Then it was you that Johnson——"

"How dare you!" cried Miriam, indignantly. "I—I followed Abraham when he went the last time——"

"Were you coming with me?" Trenholm asked eagerly.

"I was not! I was coming to explain; but I caught sight of Mr. Johnson and ran into the barn to avoid him. When you came back I was at the window in the hay-loft. I saw Mrs. Thurston before you did; I hoped and hoped you wouldn't do it——"

"But you feared I would?"

She nodded.

"My treachery, in that case, only confirmed your previous judgment?"

She gave no sign.

"Was that judgment the reason you wouldn't drive with me?"

"No. Your asking me to drive was the reason of —that."

He thought a moment. "Has anyone ever asked you to drive before?"

"Yes."

"And you refused?"

"I went."

"Why?"

"It was in the country—they were nice men——"

"More trustworthy than I am."

"You are unfair," cried Miriam, "you know that I trust you, in that way."

"In what way?" asked Trenholm, cruelly. "Would you have refused to drive with one of those

nice men if he had asked you last Saturday instead of me?"

"Under the circumstances," said the girl, swiftly and keenly, "he would not have asked me!"

The blow struck home; Trenholm bowed to her formally, and left the room.

XX

DISSATISFACTION

TRENHOLM felt an urgent need for rehabilitation. As he stood hesitating a moment outside of Miss Locke's grounds, a happy thought occurred to him; he went home, and rapidly turning over the papers on his desk, selected and arranged a sheaf of manuscript. Then going out again, he hurried up to the Thurstons, rang the bell, and asked for Helen.

There was a sound of violin music, and Lincoln, who admitted him, showed him into the drawing-room without announcing him. With her bow and violin in her left hand Helen advanced to give him her right, her face lighted with pleasure.

"I have come to ask a favor of you, Mrs. Thurston; will you listen to the opening chapters of my next story?" said Trenholm. "It is not the first time you have been victimized to this extent."

"Come in, son," said a friendly voice from the corner of the fireplace, "you've got more of an audience than you counted on. I'll add my opinion to Mrs. Thurston's—not that it wouldn't do you a heap more good to listen to her playing than to be imposing your nonsense on both of us."

Trenholm was taken aback when he saw the old rector apparently seated for a long morning call. "I

have always been ready to listen to Mrs. Thurston," he said, "but she doesn't always find me worthy; see, she puts her violin away as soon as I enter!"

"We were only talking over the music for to-morrow," said Helen.

"May I ask what to-morrow is?" inquired Trenholm.

"To-morrow," said the rector, "is the day known to Christians as Christmas Day. We have been in preparation for it about three weeks now, and anyone who had gone to church might have heard the announcements from the pulpit."

"Christmas Day!" said Trenholm, with a little sigh. "I had forgotten all about it."

Helen had drawn out a small stand which she placed by Trenholm's chair, and then, seating herself, prepared to listen.

"I tell you honestly, sir," said Trenholm, standing with his hand on the chair-back and addressing the rector; "you are going to spoil the whole thing. I know you'll not like it, I shall feel that you are critical, and I sha'n't read to advantage."

"So much the better; so much the better," insisted the rector, shaking his head obstinately. "Sit down, my son; I represent the unsympathetic consensus of public opinion; if you can carry me along then you've done better than you thought, but I doubt if you can. To tell the truth, Jim, I know you a little too well: behind all these superfine sensitivenesses and high-flown ideals of yours I never lose sight of the youngster whose Latin verbs I had to cane well into him, and whose spelling——"

"Come now, you never struck me in your life, sir."

"Well, well," sighed the old gentleman, "perhaps I didn't, but I wanted to so bad that it has left on my mind the impression of a veritable act. Yes, James, I caned you in my heart, I think, about every day—and in my prayers, I may say, every night! Go on, though; don't be frightened—we'll see how you've got your lesson now. You may need a worse caning this morning than you ever did before in all your life; and you'll get it, my boy, I promise you, you'll get it!"

He beamed on them both, smiling gently, and shaking his head, while he rested his elbows on the arms of his chair and held the points of his fingers pressed together in front of him in a judicial attitude. As he began reading, Trenholm reddened with embarrassment, and from time to time cast involuntary looks of trepidation at this formidable little figure, but gradually, as he became interested in his work, he lost sight of his hostile critic, and turned more and more toward Helen. The malicious amusement died out of the old man's eyes, and Helen, leaning forward wholly absorbed, forgot to remember that the scene was picturesque. Trenholm smiled to himself; his instruments vibrated at last to his touch.

"Well, sir," he said, in a tone half-triumphant, as he closed his manuscript after an hour's reading.

The rector got up and walked to the window; Helen made no attempt to conceal the tears that were running down her cheeks, and there was a moment of silence.

Then the old man rammed his hand deeply into the tail-pocket of his close-buttoned, clerical coat, and ex-

tracting an enormous red silk handkerchief stormily and vehemently blew his nose. "Get out of here, get out of here, you young scamp!" he cried. "I do believe you've made me cry—such nonsense at my age, to be overcome by a parcel of trash like that.—Good-by, Mrs. Thurston, it's a comfort to know that you're as big a fool as I am, else I should have felt that this giving way to emotion was but a proof of senility. —James, are you coming with me?"

"I must wait for Mrs. Thurston's opinion."

"Hasn't she given it to you? Don't be so infernally greedy, man! You'll never have a more sincere compliment than the one we both have paid you with our eyes.—Come along, my son."

He looked at Trenholm commandingly, and Trenholm obeyed.

"James, what mischief are you up to now?" he said, as they walked down the street.

"What do you mean, sir?" Trenholm temporized in true school-boy fashion.

"I mean that, in the face of all the gossip you have managed to stir up lately, you have no right to go around posing up there at the Thurstons' as a higher power—asking that woman, who is worth five of you, to listen to all that confounded foolishness!"

"I am sorry you thought it so bad, sir."

"It isn't bad! It would be a great deal better if it was bad. The thing has power, and a certain cold, delicate, heartless charm that is bound to do mischief —like its creator!"

"What's gone wrong in church affairs? Has the choir struck, or is it the bills? It must be the latter,

sir; there's a venomous quality about your abuse that points to financial straits."

"The church coal-bill," said the rector, quickly, "is very much larger than it should be, my son. You may just step into the bank and hand me over a check that will liquidate that five tons of coal. I deserve it for all I've gone through this morning. How many more chapters of that stuff have you got, anyhow?"

"Oh! six or eight."

"I reckon you'd better bring them down and read them to me this evening about nine o'clock. Most probably they've fallen off, immensely. It's a great mistake to begin things a way you can't keep up." The old gentleman opened the door of the bank, and he and Trenholm went in to "liquidate" the coal.

"If I come down to-night," said Trenholm, as the bills were being folded away in the rector's worn pocket-book, "how much is it going to cost me? Shall I have to pay for the organ and the repairs to the chancel window?"

"That depends, that depends," said the rector, hurrying off; "if the stuff's pretty poor I sha'n't charge you anything. This morning was an exceptional case." He left the bank, shutting the door behind him, without waiting for Trenholm to follow.

"Jim," said the teller, putting his head through his little window, "we're expecting Gus Johnson in here any minute."

"Well?"

"I just thought I'd mention it."

"Thank you, Bobby." Trenholm drew a chair up to the stove. "I'll wait."

" We can't allow loafing round the bank in business hours, Jim," said the teller.

" You've forgotten that I'm a director, Bobby," said Trenholm, smiling. The teller shut his window and pretended to be absorbed in accounts. Trenholm waited patiently, but at the end of half an hour Johnson had not appeared.

" Jim, I've got to shut up," said Bobby, unable to endure further suspense; " we're going to have early dinner this morning."

Trenholm stood on the steps of the bank, looking alternately up the street and across the way at the court-house; the momentary pleasure of his success with Helen and the rector was over; something within him still craved excitement. He stood ostentatiously high on the steps in order that he might be seen, but even this show of defiance did not move Johnson to appear. The streets were crowded with negroes doing their holiday shopping; the air was filled with the blare of tin horns, and the constant irritating snap of " Jackson crackers "; the village boys passed carrying large bundles of fireworks and unlighted torches, and everywhere were noise, laughter, and movement. Family parties on their way to the country drove by in carriages loaded with children and bundles, and Trenholm came to a sudden unpleasant consciousness that no one had asked him to dinner on Christmas Day. The need of rehabilitation assailed him more than ever; it was about noon, and in hope of finding either information or comfort he came slowly down the steps of the bank and sauntered toward Mrs. Bruce's. On nearing the house he saw Ailsa in the distance.

She was coming home from the Masons', where she had continued to work at intervals ever since she had left Helen, and as she walked up the street she ran a gauntlet of chaff from the black servants who were leaning over the fences assailing the passers with an unceasing stream of darkey wit. Aunt Liza and Aunt Sarah, who had been hanging on Mrs. Bruce's front gate since nine that morning, greeted her as she came in sight with screams of laughter.

"What you two ole guinea-hens cacklin' at, anyhow?" inquired Ailsa; but Aunt Liza and Aunt Sarah only nudged each other and continued their irritating mirth. Ailsa strode on, angrily, conscious that some joke upon her appearance, her gait, or her morals had passed between the two.

When she saw Trenholm she hesitated and put her hand in her pocket; but Trenholm went by as if he had not seen her. She turned swiftly and handed a paper to Aunt Sarah. "If you see Mars' Jim Trenholm dis mornin', jus' you all give him dis heah note," she said, distinctly. Trenholm stopped, involuntarily.

"Mars' Jim's right dere behine you!" Aunt Sarah giggled.

"*I* ain't seed him, nowhars," said Ailsa, and stalked on.

"I reckon dis heah's fo' you, suh," said Aunt Sarah, making a little bobbing courtesy.

"Is dinner ready, Aunt Sarah?" asked Trenholm, as he took the note.

"No, suh; 'tain't, suh; Mis' Nan's gone up street to get it, suh." Aunt Sarah brought her thin lips together in a wide line that stretched half-way across

her face. There was something in the remarkable solemnity of her expression that excited fresh spasms of mirth in Aunt Liza, who buried her head in her apron, gasping, "Oh, my! Oh, my! I gwine die, I is!"

"Ain't you got no manners, niggah!" cried Aunt Sarah, giving her a fierce dig with her elbow.

Trenholm turned away, opening his note as he went; it was an invitation to dinner at the Masons'. Zoë had written it and signed her mother's name.

General Mason's house was but a few rods farther down the street, and Trenholm walked in that direction, intending to answer at once; on reaching the gate, he met Zoë, who passed him, bowing with distant politeness. Trenholm stood quite still, and a smile of gratification lighted Zoë's face, but she kept steadily on, her heart beating a little with apprehension. What if Jim should go on up to the house to see her mother! She could not hear his steps, and in her anxiety she turned mechanically toward the station instead of proceeding up the street toward the shops and the village, as she had intended.

"Where are you going?" he said, catching up with her. He had followed, after all!

Zoë suffered a moment of indecision; at that end of the town there was nothing to be done except take a train and go away on the cars. "I am going to the station," she faltered, "to—to—send a telegram."

"May I go with you?"

"Oh, it isn't necessary! I'm only sending word to a friend of mine who asked me for a dance at the Christmas ball to-morrow."

"Perhaps you'd like me to take the telegram for you? Have you written it?"

"N-n-no; I thought I'd get a blank down there," casting wildly about in her mind as to where she should address her telegram when it was written.

"How many captives are to grace your triumph to-morrow evening?" asked Trenholm; his tone was slightly condescending.

"If you mean to-morrow night I reckon there'll be heaps of young gentlemen from away, but they're not coming on my account any more than they are on the other girls'. To-morrow evening—I reckon you think I ought to say *ahfter-r-r-noon!*—I am expecting to spend quietly at home. Papa and mamma have gone and invited some old-fogy friends of theirs to dinner; I can't say just who; I told mamma she needn't ask my opinion, for they were all alike to me."

"Then you don't know who are invited?"

"Well, I ought to know, for I wrote all the notes," she drawled. "But besides you and Miss Ellen Anne Mills——"

Trenholm could not repress an exclamation of annoyance. Miss Ellen Anne Mills admired him with a mistaken enthusiasm that always made him appear ridiculous to himself.

"I knew you'd be pleased," pursued Zoë, placidly, "and Miss Ellen Anne's sure to come, because I mentioned to her that you would probably——"

"I was just going to tell your mother that another engagement would prevent my accepting her invitation for to-morrow."

"That's too bad," said Zoë, laughing quietly;

"mamma counted on you to entertain Miss Ellen Anne. I knew, of course, you wouldn't care about talking to me; it's mighty curious how we never agree, but Miss Ellen Anne's so suitable, you know."

Trenholm looked grim; he did not care to discourse upon Miss Mills, and confined his remarks to the weather and the muddy roads until they reached the station, where Zoë made it clear that she preferred to send her telegram in private. He waited outside while she went into the office and had a quiet chat about nothing with the telegraph operator; but the telegraph operator and the station-master being one and the same person, the whistle of a coming train soon notified him that his presence was needed on the platform. Zoë followed him out in time to see one of the village hacks drive up to the side entrance at a breakneck speed; and out of it climbed Miss Ellen Anne Mills, loaded with bundles.

Trenholm looked triumphant; but Zoë, catching him by the arm, rushed cordially forward. "Jim just made me come down to bid you good-by, Miss Ellen Anne," she cried. "He said he couldn't let you go away without paying you some little attention, and he dragged me through all that mud to get here." She thrust forth a tiny, bemired foot as she spoke. Fortunately Miss Ellen Anne's trunk had been sent down earlier in the day, or in her excitement she would have utterly forgotten to take it away with her. Zoë relieved her of her packages and piled them into Trenholm's arms, who dutifully followed the gratified Miss Ellen Anne into the car, and there politely submitted to farewells that drew the attention of all on board.

"I told her I was sorry I shouldn't have the pleasure of meeting her at your house on Christmas Day," said Trenholm, when he came back; "and she said that she had not been invited."

"What lies some people tell!" said Zoë, calmly. "Let's walk home by the other road. I've got to go 'way over to old Aunt Clemmy's cabin to get her to come down to-morrow. We were expecting Ailsa to help the servants, but she's just come in to say she's going off on a picnic."

"Going?" said Trenholm; "where?"

"I'm sure I don't know; somewhere with the other niggers; they're always doing things on Christmas. Ailsa came down this morning and did nearly everything there was to do before she started. I'm mighty sorry you're not coming to dinner."

"With the old fogies?"

"Oh, I reckon you'd find them congenial."

"Are you quite sure they exist?"

"Mr. Brinton's coming, sure enough, and Dr. Rider. The rest are all married people."

The way had been growing more and more muddy, and when Zoë had done her errand at Aunt Clemmy's she stood by the road in dismay. Trenholm, who had on a pair of high rubber-boots, waded to the other side and began to lift off the topmost rail of a fence; but Zoë, growing impatient, started toward him.

"Don't cross until I put this down!" said Trenholm, turning with the rail in his hands; "go back at once."

"I can't go back, and I can't come forward either; I'm stuck!"

Trenholm threw down the rail, crossed the road, and, picking her up, carried Zoë to the opposite side before she had time to remonstrate. "Now, then," he said, "give me your foot."

With her back against the fence Zoë held out her clay-encrusted shoe. Trenholm went down on his knees, pulled out his handkerchief and attempted to wipe off the mud. They were both so much absorbed that they did not notice Brinton coming down the road toward them at a half run; but when the sound of his heavy steps reached her ears, Zoë looked up.

"Ah!" she said, "one of the other old fogies!"

Brinton reached them breathless, and, scarcely stopping, began an apology to Zoë as he passed: "I'm on a rush for the down train and can't stop. Tell your mother, Miss Zoë, that I've been called off to Leesville suddenly and shall be gone all day to-morrow. I've written her an answer to her note."

"Good-morning," said Trenholm, still assiduously brushing the mud from Zoë's foot, which he held in one hand while he wiped it with the other.

Brinton did not appear to see him; Zoë gave the foot that he was holding an imperative little kick; Trenholm dropped it and arose. "I'm sorry that you're not going to be at Mrs. Mason's to-morrow," he said to Brinton.

"Yes," drawled Zoë, "it's too bad of both of you to desert us; Mr. Trenholm has declined too. But of course you'll be back in time for the ball, Mr. Brinton, after making me save three whole dances for you!"

Brinton half stopped. "Three?" he asked.

"Was it four?" inquired Zoë, innocently.

A distant whistle started Brinton on a run again. "It was five, Miss Zoë, five!—I'll be there!" and he shot away at the top of his speed.

"Now, then," said Trenholm; "the other foot."

"Much obliged," said Zoë, still looking after Brinton's vanishing figure; "I prefer it muddy."

"You can't walk with it that way, you'll spoil your gown; but, remember, I don't want to be kicked while I am cleaning it."

"You deserved it."

"And why? If I was good enough to clean your shoes before Brinton came, I supposed I might be considered worthy to do it while he was here."

But Zoë persisted in going home with one muddy and one clean shoe; and Trenholm, meeting Mrs. Mason at the door, accepted her invitation to dinner next day with effusion.

XXI

REBELLION

JOHNSON had missed his engagement at the bank, but it made very little difference to him or to anyone else; all engagements in Tallawara were elastic.

He had been out in the country, but on his return to the village, as he rode past the Longs', he met Miriam, and, throwing his reins over his arm, alighted from his horse to speak with her. He had no sooner done so than he regretted it, for, coming out of the side road, Ailsa advanced toward them.

She stopped in front of the gate. "I can give you your washing this evenin', Mars' Gus," she said, politely. "I hope, Miss Mi'iam, you'll excuse me interruptin' you, but Mr. Johnson, he was in such a mighty big hurry yest'day——"

Johnson had turned on her swiftly; his back was toward Miriam; Ailsa received the look of intelligence in his eyes with an expression of unchanging stolidity.

"Oh, Ailsa," said Miriam, "do you think you will have time to do up some lace for me?"

"Cert'nly I could, Miss Mi'iam," said Ailsa; "I'd be glad to."

"Then wait a minute;" and Miriam ran into the house to get it.

"Do you mean you'll go?" said Johnson to Ailsa. She was so tall that she stood almost on a level with his eyes.

"Why not?"

"All right, then; I'll be on the road at the foot of the hill, below the church, to-night at nine o'clock."

Ailsa laughed, and they stood a few moments talking in whispers until Miriam appeared in the door with her bundle of lace, when they took on the semblance of master and servant with ready mendacity.

"Why, Hannibal!" said Miriam, stopping on the top step of the porch before she descended to the path, "what are you digging up that rose for?"

Johnson and Ailsa cast a look of alarm at each other. The place where they had been talking was screened from the house by the long straggling branches of a clump of Cherokee roses, behind which Hannibal apparently was digging.

"Suppose he heard?" whispered Johnson.

Ailsa shook her head. She dared not speak; Miriam was coming down the path.

Something in their attitude displeased the young girl; she bade Johnson a cool good-morning and returned to the house.

Ailsa went home, the triumphant swing of her gait somewhat abated, and her spirits unexpectedly dampened. The night before when Johnson proposed it, this expedition to spend Christmas Day with him at the Guthrie mansion had had very little attraction for her; but when she came across him talking to Miriam, it had not taken her a second to decide that she would go, the plan offering the double advantage of carry-

ing Johnson away from a dangerous rival and of satisfying the boiling antagonism she felt just then toward Trenholm.

In regard to Hannibal, however, she was a little uneasy. Heavy-footed and awkward as Hannibal was, she knew that when necessary he was capable of an almost cat-like silence and lightness. "If dat nigger was squattin' down dere behine dat Cherokee rose, we'se gwine see trouble," she muttered to herself uneasily.

But her fears were by no means so strong as her will, and she set about carrying out her plans by spending a portion of the afternoon among her friends, announcing widely her intention to go to a neighboring town to pay her mother a visit.

Hannibal did not come home until evening that day. He had taken his dinner at the Mission, and gone later to work for General Mason. As he made his way through the crowded streets of the village he had been cogitating upon an insoluble problem: "The road below what church?" Two churches in Tallawara answered the description. One was the Episcopal church and the other the colored Presbyterian church. They were at opposite ends of the village, about equally distant from his own cabin. He was not at all clear in his mind as to Ailsa and Johnson's intentions, and he was not even angry as yet; but in his slow and simple way he had determined to prevent their meeting, and so long as he was sure of accomplishing this he was satisfied.

When he arrived at home the cabin was full of the appetizing odor of fried chicken and doughnuts—this

also was encouraging; if Ailsa meant to go off with Gus Johnson she wouldn't be so particular as to pleasing him.

" 'Pears to me," he said, looking at the great dish of smoking brown meat and the enormous colander of doughnuts, " 'pears to me you mus' be thinkin' you ah cookin' fo' a hotel, Ailsa."

" No, sir," said Ailsa, " I'se cookin' fo' a pig; I is, an' I has to cook enough. Besides," she added, " I'se gwine down to Prestonpans on de nine o'clock train to-night to see my ole mammy."

" Who gwine take home dat washin' den? " inquired Hannibal.

" I gwine take it round to ole Aunt Clemmy," said Ailsa, readily; " she said she'd give it to Mars' Gus for me."

Hannibal made no comment, but seating himself in front of the table he partook of Ailsa's good cooking with a heartiness that justified her gibe at his appetite. Then he lit a pipe and sat down in front of the log fire and smoked.

It was a much more cheerful place than the homes of most negroes. The walls were papered with rows of pictures cut from the illustrated weeklies and magazines, with here and there a gorgeous Christmas page that was the pride of Ailsa's color-loving heart; the windows were glazed, the paint was clean, and the ceiling whitewashed. Hannibal reflected dumbly that Ailsa certainly knew how to make him comfortable. " She cert'nly does," he repeated aloud.

Ailsa's guilty conscience caused her heart to give a sudden fearful bound. " She cert'nly does what? " she

repeated, coming and standing in front of him, aggressively.

Hannibal looked at her steadily from head to foot, and the pause gave weight to his answer. "She cert'nly does make a man comf'table," he said slowly. "Yes, Ailsa, you does. You make him mighty comf'table in his body, but you ah pow'ful wearin' on de soul. I tell you, woman, you frail me out worse'n if you didn't cook so well."

Ailsa gave a shrill laugh and whirled about on her heels, in a couple of turns of mad waltzing, that drew the smoke down from the chimney and scattered the gray-white ashes over the neat braided rug that lay on the floor in front of the hearth. A tip of her fluttering petticoat caught in the blaze. "My Lord, woman," said Hannibal, springing forward and crushing it between his hands, "you done gone crazy, you is. I reckon de bes' thing I can do for you would be to shut you up and lock de do'. I reckon it would." He looked at her, standing thoughtfully and rubbing the palm of his burnt hand against his hip.

"It's about time fo' me to go down to Clemmy's," she said.

"All right," said Hannibal, "I'll go along. Dere's a mighty rough lot on de streets to-night. 'Tain't proper for a lady to be walkin' round by her own self widout nobody to escorch her."

"Get out! I ain't gwine have no black nigger taggin' after me."

"You ain't gwine leave dis house widout me. I reckon I know better dan to let my wife go meetin' Gus Johnson down on de road behine de—church!"

" Land sakes, he ain't gwine meet me!" said Ailsa, impatiently, " it's Clemmy he gwine meet, down behine de 'Piscopal church, so dat he won't have to climb de hill; an' I ain't so mighty anxious to go down to Clemmy's in de dark. You can take 'em yo'self if you want to. You better hurry up, too, fo' I want you to get back in time to see me off on de Prestonpans train."

Hannibal was staggered. "Ah' you, sho' nuff, gwine down to Prestonpans see yo' mammy? " he asked.

" Sho' nuff," said Ailsa, who was tying up the shirts, with her back turned to him. " Didn't you heah me tell Mars' Gus Johnson I was gwine to go? "

" Cross yo' heaht! An' say ' I wish I may die! ' "

Ailsa hesitated; then she made some motion in the air; " wish you may die! " she mumbled, inarticulately.

" If you'll wait till to-morrow, I'll go 'long," said Hannibal.

" Course I'll wait. I'se mos' wore out an' I'll be glad of a good night's res'," said Ailsa, heartily. " Why'n't you say so befo' ? "

" Why'n't you ax me befo'? "

" Case you all make such a racket every time I has axed you dat I made up my min' I'd nevah ax you again."

This was true, but still Hannibal's suspicions were not quite lulled to rest. Ailsa busied herself with her housework; she wound the clock, she swept, she dusted, and it seemed an unusually long time before she seated herself at her evening task of putting together her " piezes " in a patchwork quilt. Hannibal smoked and watched her; at last, with a yawn, she got up, and,

announcing that she was going to bed, took off her dress and hung it on a peg on the door.

"It's quarter to eight—what's the use o' waitin' any longer?" she said, standing in front of Hannibal, and stretching her long brown arms toward the fire; "you hump yo'self along to Clemmy's an' tell her to take de shirts down de road 'bout nine. Heah, g'won on in dere an' git my night-gown fo' me firs'!"

Hannibal went into the bedroom, a little lean-to built at the back of the cabin, and soon came back with the desired article, which Ailsa warmed before drawing it over her head, and then, letting her skirts drop upon the floor, she proceeded to bed.

Hannibal was satisfied; he took up the basket of shirts and left the house.

No sooner had he gone than Ailsa dashed from the bedroom. "Good Lordy!" she said, "I don' belieb he's done lef' me mo'n five minits to git dere in!" and in the hottest haste she drew on her clothes. Wrapping herself in her cloak and twisting her head in a black muffler, she seized the basket of provisions, which she had prepared under Hannibal's unsuspecting eyes, and left the house, running with all her strength to the cross-road behind the colored Presbyterian church.

XXII

BLIND CHANCE

WITH the flat basket on his arm and his hat pulled down low over his eyes Hannibal slouched toward the village, his fears and his suspicions wholly set at rest. His road led him by a large boarding-school, where some preparations were being made for an exhibition of fireworks. Remembering Ailsa's fondness for such sights he determined to run back and tell her to dress herself and come out, as it was still early. He stopped a moment, heard the horns tooting from the village streets, and watched a party of girls and boys recklessly aiming at each other with the long fiery Roman candles.

"My Lawd, chillen," he called, "you all bound to put yo' eyes out." But he only succeeded in drawing a fusillade upon himself before which he turned and ran swiftly home again.

He opened the door of the cabin and looked about. He could not have told where the difference lay, but he knew that Ailsa was not there. He strode to the bedroom and flung open the door; she was gone! He had felt sure of it from the moment he had crossed the threshold.

Without stopping an instant, either to close the doors or even to look about more carefully, he rushed from the house, tore wildly by the back streets toward the

suspected rendezvous behind the Episcopal church, intent on getting there before her. It was dark, the road was wet, and the clay was heavy. As he fled past the lights and noise of the seminary grounds a flight of rockets spread up into the upper air, and the gay shouts of the young people followed it. The clock on one of the village churches struck nine. "What she change ouah clock fo'?" said Hannibal, searching in his pocket for his knife.

He reached the top of the hill where the church stood, and as he ran downward he made out in the darkness that a man was waiting there, standing in an attitude of indecision. With a growl, like some wild beast, Hannibal threw himself upon him, knife in hand, and as he did so, Trenholm's face was suddenly illuminated by the flare of the match with which he was trying to light his cigar. It was too late to stop, and, although the force of the blow was broken by his surprise and horrible dismay, Hannibal's knife descended in an ugly stab.

"Oh, Hannibal!" said Trenholm, in a voice that sounded like the reproach of a hurt child, "what did you do that for?"

"Fo' God, Mars' Jim; I didn't go to hurt you; I took you fo' Gus Johnson. Ailsa's runnin' away with him."

Hannibal had placed his arm around Trenholm's waist, and, without any conscious intention, was slowly guiding him up the hill toward the rectory. The noise of shouts and laughter from the village came more distinctly as they neared the brow of the hill.

"Look here," said Trenholm, feebly, "you've got

to get out of this, Hannibal. More than half of the boys are drunk, and if they catch you there is no knowing what may happen."

Hannibal's clasp only tightened around Trenholm's waist; he continued doggedly helping him up the hill.

"Let me down," panted Trenholm; "can't you see they are coming? Let me down, Hannibal. If they got you, they'd burn you alive to-night! I should never get over it; let me down, I say!"

Hannibal glanced up and saw at the far end of the street a party of young men with lighted torches turning the corner.

"Let me down," insisted Trenholm, weakly, "and run. Run like the devil!"

Hannibal let Trenholm slowly sink to the ground, and then ran swiftly, silently, around by the back of the rectory, cutting through the cemetery and crossing the town to where he hoped to intercept the rendezvous at the other church.

"Gus Johnson boun' to be late—ain't never been on time yit," he panted, "an' ef I cotch him—I'll finish him dis time!" But when he reached the spot the sound of Ailsa's laugh was borne to him on the wind, with the light rattle of wheels as a buggy turned the crest of the farthest hill.

"Niggah laugh!" panted Hannibal, and ran on. Before long, however, he saw that it would be necessary to abate his pace, and his wild run subsided to a steady trot. He was so sure that they were bound for the Guthrie mansion that he felt quite unhurried, and the idea of being pursued in his turn hardly occurred to him until, at the end of about an hour and a half, when

he had seated himself on a felled tree at the roadside for a moment's rest, he heard in the far distance the faint baying of a hound.

" 'Taint no time for 'coon huntin' to-night," he reflected, idly, and then fell to planning as to how best he could spring upon Johnson unawares. But the baying of the dogs suddenly blew toward him more distinctly. He rose to his feet; his eyes rimmed white with terror.

" Dem ain't no 'coon dogs! Dey's after *me!*" he muttered; then he turned and ran again at his first speed.

Once, as he came by a brook which flowed in a deep gully at the side of the road, he jumped down and waded for a long distance. All he desired was to delay the hunt for the few minutes which would serve him to " finish " Gus Johnson.

As he neared the Guthrie mansion he saw that the windows of the second story were lighted. Panting and stumbling Hannibal made for the house; the pillars of the wide veranda were twined thick with vines, and here and there a horizontal cleat had been nailed to prevent the roses from falling to the ground; taking off his shoes Hannibal climbed up and, cat-like, crossed the upper gallery or second story of the porch.

The blinds of the window were closed, but the slats were so turned that he could see in distinctly; a fire was blazing on the hearth. Johnson was sitting at the table, and Ailsa had just finished unpacking the basket and spreading the supper; she paused to speak, resting her hand on one end of the table opposite Johnson; the red flames lighted her face as she stood there.

Hannibal, who had retained his knife, put it between his teeth and cautiously opened the shutter. He made no noise, but Ailsa, who was almost facing him, suddenly caught sight of the terrible face with the ferocious eyes and the knife held in the white teeth; the impudent grin froze on her face; she could not speak, but she raised her hand with the slow heaviness of a person in a nightmare, and pointed. Johnson wheeled about, his hand flying automatically to his hip-pocket. Hannibal crouched down below the window ledge.

"Don't shoot," cried Ailsa, and threw herself forward in an attempt to dash the pistol from Johnson's hand.

The next instant the yard was full of the tumult of baying dogs, shouting men, and trampling horses. "Dey's after me, Ailsa;" Hannibal's voice came in through the noise; "dey'll burn me alive if dey cotch me. I done stab Mars' Jim in mistake down dere by de 'Piscopal church—fo' God I didn't mean ter!"

Johnson stood dazed and overcome; both he and Hannibal had given up all projects of injuring each other. The situation had taken on a new aspect: for Hannibal it had acquired an awful terror, too well justified; for Johnson, to be found there at that time with Ailsa, meant ruin to all his plans: political, financial, and matrimonial. "Get out of here," he suddenly shouted, turning to Ailsa. "You know where to hide him! Get out, or I'll give you both up!"

Ailsa sped silently from the room and, a moment later, her low call came from the far end of the porch. Through all the din below, Johnson's ears detected the sound of Hannibal's stealthy shuffle as he crawled

warily, next the wall, in that direction. Johnson waited a few moments and then, in answer to the shouts and clamoring of the men, went down and opened the front door, holding a flaring kerosene lamp high above his head. He was confronted by the sheriff and a posse of hastily summoned constables.

"You are my prisoner," said the sheriff.

"What for?" blustered Johnson.

"For the murder of Jim Trenholm," answered the sheriff. "You know well enough."

"I haven't seen Jim Trenholm since—since the day we met in Muhlenberg's store," said Johnson.

"All right," said the sheriff, "you'll soon have a chance to prove it."

"Look here, sheriff," said one of the men, "Jim said that the fellow that stabbed him was a nigger."

"Jim might be mistaken," answered the sheriff. "Come along, Gus Johnson, it's lucky for you you're white. For the way the fellows are feelin' about it, I doubt if you'd get back to town alive if you weren't!"

The dogs in the meanwhile had been nosing around the porch at the foot of the pillars. One of them now trotted across and stood in front of Johnson, wagging his tail in a friendly way. Johnson looked at the sheriff.

"It don't seem to be me they have tracked," he said. "Besides, I don't see how they could, for I came down here in a buggy."

"I reckon Gus is right, sheriff," said the speaker who had remonstrated before. "Any of your niggers been up to town, Gus, to-day?"

"They all have," said Johnson. "But old Uncle Billy, who was in here this afternoon and made my fire,

is the only darkey that's been about the house to-day. —By the way," he said, " Uncle Billy walked all the way from Tallawara; he drove up there with a turkey I sent to Dr. Rider, but he left the horse and buggy for me and walked back. Do you suppose you have been tracking him? "

The men looked at each other foolishly.

In the meantime the dogs had been circling uneasily about the house. Suddenly there was a loud baying; one of them had retaken the scent. Johnson's hands twitched convulsively, but no one noticed it. He passed a moment of intense anxiety as he followed the men who all rushed again to the back of the house. The dogs made straight across a narrow patch of garden, and stopped outside of an old cabin that was built very near the house. The men rushed after them, battered in the door, and entered; howling and baying, the dogs began scratching up the earthen floor; but the cabin was not only empty of humanity,—with the exception of a ragged mattress or pallet it had not in it a vestige of furnishing of any kind. It had evidently been deserted for years. A little heap of kindling wood lay in one corner.

" I'm sure you have been tracking Billy now," said Johnson, " for this is where he usually keeps his lightwood."

" Whoever we have tracked," said one of the men, " he's been in here. See that." The dogs were careering wildly about, scratching the ground in every direction. The men followed them, opening a rough closet at one side and occasionally pounding on the walls. But the cabin was of logs and there was no place of

concealment in it. The scent, whatever it was, was apparently lost there.

"Well, gentlemen," said Johnson, "do you still insist upon my coming back with you?" A chorus of voices arose, some assenting, some dissenting. But the sheriff was not to be shaken, and the two drove back to Tallawara together. Johnson thought very fast on that drive with the sheriff, and said little.

It was almost two o'clock when the party arrived at Tallawara, but the bells and horns which proclaimed the advent of Christmas had not yet ceased ringing. Johnson sent at once for a cousin of his, a young lawyer.

"They found a basket of your clean shirts just below the place where Jim was found," said the lawyer, thoughtfully, when he had heard as much of the story as Johnson chose to tell. "Who done up those shirts for you?"

Johnson hesitated. "Well," he said, "I reckon Aunt Clemmy had better be the person."

"Hadn't you better tell me the whole truth?" said his cousin.

"No, sir, I hadn't," said Johnson. "I didn't try to kill Jim Trenholm, and mighty sorry I am that I didn't! As for the rest of it, I'm in a mess, and a mess that I've got to get out of without explanations."

Johnson's cousin looked at him sneeringly. "As there is only one kind of mess that you're apt to get into, you needn't bother about your explanations; the only trouble in my mind is how I'm going to keep the whole town from spotting the thing as easily as I have myself. Why can't you let that woman be, Gus?"

"Who said anything about any woman? You mind your business and go home now, and be sure you don't let anybody see you going to Clemmy's."

"It's mighty hard to get to Clemmy's on Christmas night, there's somebody about the place all the time."

"Well; you be careful!" said Johnson.

The next morning Trenholm, whose wound was not at all serious, was able to testify clearly that his assailant had been a colored man. When they asked Trenholm if he had recognized the negro he said that it was too dark to recognize anybody, and the blow was given too suddenly.

The basket of clothes was satisfactorily disposed of by Aunt Clemmy's coming forward to claim it. She lived in a little cabin on the hill-side not far from the rectory of the Episcopal church, and her story ran that the clothes, having been confided to her to wash, she had finished them and set them outside her door for old Billy, who apparently had forgotten to come for them. "'Bout nine o'clock yest'day night I heard a man's step on de porch an' den feet runnin' off down de path, an' when I looked out ob de winda, dere was somebody gwine off wiv dem clo'es. I started out soon's I could, an' de fus' thing I come across was Mars' Jim Trenholm layin' dere on de road a-bleedin' as hard as he could bleed from a cut in his side. 'Twasn't my fault 't all," she said; "I done looked after dem clo'es de bes' I could; an' dis heah man he jus' come up an' stole 'em! I reckon he ran up against Mars' Jim an' thought he gwine cotch him, and gave him dat knife cut so 't he could git away."

Clemmy's air of candor and truthfulness diverted all

suspicion from Hannibal and Ailsa, which was just then Johnson's sole solicitude, and he was set at liberty immediately after Trenholm's evidence.

That evening Johnson determined to take the risk of returning to the Guthrie place. He found Hannibal and Ailsa comfortably established in one of the upper rooms, secure in the terror inspired by the reputation the house had of being haunted. With the negro's invincible carelessness of consequences Ailsa had lighted a fire and was frying some ham that filled the air about with an odor strong enough to shatter even a negro's faith in the unseen.

"This will never do!" said Johnson.

"How's Mars' Jim?" inquired Ailsa.

"Well—he's alive," said Johnson, truthfully, "but the whole country is on the search for the man who stabbed him, and the sooner you leave the better. I want to send that pair of gray mules down to Crown County——"

"My Lawd! I don't want to go to Crown County!" ejaculated Hannibal.

"We cain't do no pickin' an' choosin' now," said Ailsa.

"I'll give you letters to some people along the road who'll put you up in the daytime," said Johnson; "for you'd better travel at night all you can. Now get out, you've got to make a start as soon as you can get those mules fed."

"We haven't had no supper yet," said Ailsa, sulkily.

"Eat as you go along!" said Johnson, impatiently. "I must be back in Tallawara by half-past nine or ten, and I'm not going to start until I see you two off."

XXIII

DIVERSE IDEALS

IT was not the custom in Tallawara to house the servants under the same roof with their employers; either they were provided with cabins in the yard at a short distance from the house, or they lived at their own homes, coming to their work in the mornings. It thus came about that Helen's cook brought her such a serious account of Trenholm's wound that Thurston hurried off before breakfast on Christmas Day to make inquiries of Miss Locke.

"Miss Sarah's been all night down at Mars' Jim's," said Sue, full of importance. "She ain't retihed yet, suh, an' I presume she'll be willin' to see you ef you'll jus' send up you ca'd." Sue had travelled with her mistress and come home extremely elegant.

"Never mind the card; but ask Miss Locke if she'll let me know how seriously Mr. Trenholm has been wounded."

"It's mighty serious, suh; de knife has done punctuated de hea't."

"What nonsense!" said Miss Locke, coming to the door. "Go out to the kitchen, Sue, and make me a cup of coffee immediately. It's a bad cut," she said, turning to Thurston, "but nothing dangerous. He will probably be up and about at the end of a week, if he is prudent."

"How did it happen?"

"I don't know," said Miss Locke, shortly. "But I am told—" she emphasized the "told"—"that he tried to stop some negro who was running away with stolen goods, and that the fellow stabbed him."

"Did they catch the negro?"

"No; they tracked someone straight to the Guthrie mansion, but it seems that the dogs were on the wrong trail; they had been following old Billy all the time."

"And they found no one down there but old Billy?"

"They found Guthrie Johnson himself; but Jim told me on his word of honor that he was stabbed by a negro.—I know he is concealing something!" she added, a slight bitterness in her tone.

"I am glad to be able to go home and relieve my wife's apprehensions," said Thurston, and he left the house.

At the gate he met the rector. "Yes; it isn't a dangerous wound," said the old gentleman, in answer to Thurston's congratulatory tone. "At least, it's not dangerous to James! How it's going to affect the rest of the community, especially the negroes and women, there's no saying."

"Do you know how it happened? Miss Locke doesn't seem to give much credit to Trenholm's having attempted to stop some thief."

"Don't ask me!" cried the rector, ill-temperedly. "Last night Jim said a nigger stabbed him and ran away; that's all! But to-day—lo! this grand thief story has sprung up like a mushroom! As for Jim, if you say anything to him about it, he laughs and gives you no satisfaction."

"It must be a relief to you that he is well enough to laugh at all."

The rector shrugged his shoulders; his manner was replete with discontent and mortification. "Miss Locke, in there, I reckon, knows all about it?"

"No, she says she is as much in the dark as——"

"Any of the rest of us!" The rector's countenance cleared, and he walked on cheerfully until they came to Thurston's gate.

"Have you had your breakfast, sir?" said Thurston.

"I've had all I want," said the rector. "I don't take much breakfast, and this morning my boy didn't have it ready, so I didn't wait."

"You must come in and breakfast with us."

The rector hesitated. "Do you know, I think I'd like to do it. I haven't sat down to a family breakfast for years. My parishioners invite me to supper, and sometimes to dinner; but as for breakfast, why, I've forgotten what it looks like! Are you sure, though, that Mrs. Thurston approves of your bringing in unexpected company like this?"

Thurston laughed; in his heart he was very proud of Helen's house-keeping, and it pleased him not a little to invite the rector in this informal manner. He led the old gentleman into the dining-room; Helen was already seated. The room was full of Christmas cheer; wreaths were hanging from the picture-frames, and above the fire-place a long green branch of Jackson vine covered nearly one side of the wall with its exquisite tracery of fine leaves. A fire blazed on the hearth; the silver sparkled on the table in front of Helen; a great bunch of mistletoe was fastened to the

lamp, and Helen had tucked a small sprig in her hair. The sunlight poured in at the windows, and the window-sills were filled with green plants. It was a common scene, such as one might find in almost any house, but something about it touched the rector with an emotion beyond his self-control.

"I have brought Dr. Rider home to breakfast," said Thurston, in answer to Helen's startled glance; for her first thought had been that they had come with some serious news of Trenholm.

The old clergyman crossed the room, and as his eyes fell upon the ornament in Helen's hair, a look of mischief crossed his face. "I suppose you've put that there for the Professor," he said, "but that don't prevent me from getting ahead of him; and, stooping, he gallantly kissed her hand.

"I wish you a Merry Christmas!" said Helen.

"Merry?" said the rector, sadly; "a thinking man can no longer be merry in this distracted country of mine, but this looks more like it than anything I have seen in years! Somehow or other, Mrs. Thurston, Christmas is more Christmas at breakfast than any other time! But where are your curl-papers?"

"She never wears curl-papers," said Thurston, indignantly.

"Oh, come now, Professor, own up; doesn't she appear in them sometimes on ordinary days? Or does she wear those awful horn things? You know what I mean: two great big iron pins, with hair twisted in and out and clamped down at the ends?"

Thurston shook his head and laughed. "She hasn't those, either. Do you want me to get her some?"

"God forbid!" said the rector, piously. "I'll just tell you the truth; it's those big spikes that have prevented me from marrying. When it came to the point, and I thought of seeing a woman in a Mother Hubbard wrapper and a bristling head every morning at breakfast, I just couldn't stand it. Romance died."

The rector sat down at the table, Helen poured his coffee, and Lincoln flurried in and out with plates and silver, occasionally followed by audible instructions from his mother at the door.

"You have neither of you told me a word about Mr. Trenholm," said Helen.

"It is only a flesh wound," said Thurston.

"Yes," said the rector, "that's Jim's luck! He's just hurt enough to make him all the more interesting to the ladies."

"But who did it?" asked Helen.

"It's the queerest thing I ever heard of," said the rector. "They set the dogs on the scent before it was an hour old, in fact, it could not possibly have been an hour; they tracked it straight down into the country, and yet, when they got there, out comes Gus Johnson and says that they've been tracking old Billy, who went back to the Guthrie mansion at about three o'clock in the afternoon."

"The dogs?" said Helen, incredulously; "what do you mean?"

"The hounds, you know," said the rector. "As soon as they found Jim the boys went off for the sheriff and his hounds; they lost a little time chasing down the road, for Jim told them the wrong direction; but, as soon as they started, the hounds made a bee-line

through the upper end of the town, past the colored Presbyterian church, and straight on to the Guthrie mansion."

"Do you mean that they took out dogs and chased the man that stabbed Mr. Trenholm?"

"Why, how were they going to track him any other way?" said the rector.

"A man!"

"Yes, a nigger."

"Do they often do that?"

The rector put down his knife and fork and looked at her with a little smile. "I don't think they have done it," he said, "for about three weeks, not since they tracked Steve Potter for stealing a pair of gloves out of Johnson's store."

"They set hounds on them for thieving?"

"Oh, yes," said the rector, "it's an excellent plan, too. The hounds are not like your modern detectives; they don't mix themselves up with all sorts of theories. When they get on a scent they follow it, and it's mighty seldom that a man's able to throw them off."

Helen's cheeks were burning.

"Mrs. Thurston's shocked at us," said Dr. Rider, looking across the table at Thurston.

"If anyone but you had told me I should not have believed it," she said, indignantly.

"You see," said Thurston, "it would be impossible to find a criminal in these great swampy tracts of country if they didn't use the dogs."

"You?" cried Helen, reproachfully.

"There now, Brutus, how do you feel?" said the rector. "Why, Mrs. Thurston, it's a heap better to

put such work on a dog than it is to set human beings to the degrading task of tracking down their fellowmen!"

"Oh, forget it! It's Christmas," said Helen.

"I'm willing enough to forget," said the old gentleman, peaceably; "but if you'll look around you a little, Mrs. Thurston, you'll find a heap more things in Tallawara better worth getting mad about than our hounds! For example, there will probably not be a man in church this blessed morning!"

XXIV

A MEETING

THE rector was not far wrong; there were, indeed, very few men in church Christmas morning, and Helen would have agreed with the soprano that the long hours of practice had been wasted on a congregation of mere women, had not the alto suggested tartly that she "reckoned they were praising God and not giving a free concert, and if the men wanted to stand round the drug-store and gossip about Jim Trenholm, it was their loss, not hers!"

But there was a dreary sense of something lacking in the holiday that gave Helen a desire to retaliate. "If the servants were not all going away," she said to Thurston after an early dinner, "I should clean house; as it is, I feel very much inclined to wash the windows myself—the front windows!"

"But they don't need it," said Thurston.

"No; there would be no point in doing it if they did."

Thurston gave a short sigh and returned to his papers. He had only that moment been thinking how pleasant it was on this their first Christmas! The fire had been crackling cosily, but the windows were wide open, and the soft warm air moved the curtains back and forth in peaceful breaths. Everything in the room

shone as for a feast, and Mrs. Mason had sent a bouquet of flowers from the "pit" that filled all the air with fragrance. Helen, sitting by the window, was dressed in some light gown that fell in the clinging folds that Thurston liked. He thought that she had put it on for this reason, and he had been happy.

"I wonder how Trenholm is?" she said, absently.

"I think I will go and ask," said Thurston, rising so abruptly that his chair fell over backward.

Helen gave a little start of annoyance.

"Have you any message for *Mr.* Trenholm?" said Thurston, stopping at the door.

"Message?" She looked at him wonderingly. "Oh!—for Trenholm," as she became conscious of the slight stress that he had put upon one word. "Nothing, but that I am sorry he was hurt." She watched Thurston go down the garden-walk, and when he turned and lifted his hat to her as he reached the gate, she smiled faintly, so faintly that Thurston did not see it.

"Are you at home?" called a voice from the porch. "Don't get up, I'll come round through the hall. I couldn't stand it another minute down at our house!" and Zoë Mason came in and sank into a chair, fanning herself as if in the last stage of exhaustion. "Oh," she went on viciously, "I wish that nobody in the South had ever been born until after the War!"

"If you'll have patience your wish may be fulfilled in time," said Helen, who was becoming accustomed to Zoë's outbursts. "What is wrong to-day?"

"Oh, everything! Mamma and papa had a lot of old friends to dinner, and they have been sitting down

there at our house talking about the awful state the country's in, and all the dreadful things that are happening, and how no lady in mamma's day ever thought of using anything but real lace, and how papa's father fought a duel; and how his grandfather kept his money in a chest, and whenever they wanted any they went and got it, without ever counting it. I told papa that I, for one, would be mighty glad if they'd do that now, but he didn't seem to see it. And then Dr. Rider declared that we were fast becoming a merely commercial people, and that before long Southerners would give up all idea of being ladies and gentlemen, and turn themselves into a lot of money-grabbing accountants like the Northerners!" Zoë stopped to take breath.

"Do you think Dr. Rider meant it?" asked Helen, feeling a little pang of hurt pride that the Doctor's friendship had not been warm enough to soften his prejudices, at least, for that one day.

"Of course he didn't mean it!" cried Zoë. "It's only that they all get together and egg each other on until even Dr. Rider is ready to throw stones at the best friends he has. Now I hate the North—" Zoë looked defiantly at Helen as she enunciated this sweeping principle—"I hate 'em in a lump—but I've yet to see the individual Northerner I didn't like mighty well."

"Have you known many?"

"No, only you and the Professor."

"And Miss Locke."

"I'm afraid I forgot Miss Locke, and, anyhow, she don't like me; besides, you and the Professor are more like Southerners. I wonder, Mrs. Thurston," with an accent of lively curiosity, "if you all, up there, sit round

and find fault with the South the way we all do with the North?"

"Why—I don't know—perhaps not quite so much; but still—" Helen faltered, and then began again. "Do you find a great deal of fault with the North here in Tallawara?"

"If you once heard us speak our minds you'd think that every trouble we'd had since the beginning of time was your fault, and I'm sick of it, for one! Is it the fault of the North if some lazy nigger, that probably has belonged to us and our grandfathers for generations, chooses to stab Jim Trenholm down there on the road that goes by the Episcopal church? And if Jack Rollins wants to go on a spree with old Louis's grandson Steve, and they get so drunk and noisy that the sheriff tries to arrest them and Steve resists, is it the fault of the North that Jack Rollins should turn around and shoot him?"

"Shoot whom?"

"Shoot Steve! Of course he wouldn't shoot the sheriff,—the sheriff's a white man!"

"But I thought I saw Jack Rollins this morning!" said Helen.

"Yes," said Zoë, "and I suspect he feels pretty bad, too, for they don't know whether Steve's going to live or not."

"Haven't they arrested Jack Rollins yet?"

"Of course not! What's he done to be arrested?"

"Well," stammered Helen, "he nearly killed a man."

"Why, Mrs. Thurston! You're most as bad as old Louis; he was going up and down the street this morn-

ing saying he thought he'd better move North, that there was no justice in this part of the world for a black man.—What else could Jack Rollins do? The sheriff's an old man——"

"He is a strong old man."

"Jack couldn't stand by and see that black Steve pitching into a white man. That's one thing you've got to learn if you're going to live here; you must stand by your color; right or wrong, you've got to do it. Here in the town they are five to one; there's no knowing what would happen if we encouraged them to think they were abused. That's the reason we feel the way we do about the Mission."

"I think you misunderstand about the Mission? The negroes there are not encouraged to think that they are abused, they are only encouraged to be useful citizens and good men."

"It isn't only words that stir up discontent, it's actions; if those people out there make themselves one with the negroes, it encourages the negroes to think themselves abused by making our attitude seem—Oh, dear," she stopped abruptly, "what did we get started on this for? We never have before."

At that moment another light step crossed the porch. "Mis' Helen's right in de library," they heard Lincoln's voice addressing some guest, and the next minute Miriam Long stood in the open door. Zoë arose instantly, as if about to take flight, and then sat down again. Miriam hesitated and half turned away.

Helen stepped forward. "Miss Long," she said; "Miss Mason."

Miriam did not advance; she looked at Zoë ques-

tioningly, determined not to incur a rebuff; there was something fine and noble in the carriage of her head and the clear honesty of her gaze.

It appealed to things of a like character in Zoë. "How do you do, Miss Long?" she said. "You've come just in time to save us from quarrelling about politics."

"In all the time that I have been here," said Helen, "I have never felt the slightest inclination to quarrel about politics, and no one has ever, intentionally, said anything that would seem to be critical or hostile."

"Do we say critical and hostile things unintentionally?" asked Zoë.

"Yes, but they never hurt; you mean to be so polite that they are only funny. After all, you really know nothing of the North, and I feel that I might be here for years and years and yet know very little more about the South."

"But that's because we hide things!" said Zoë. "Do you remember the first time I saw you at Mrs. Bruce's? Well, I was on pins and needles about Jim; that day I had picked up all his letters for ten days back, not one of 'em opened; when Mrs. Bruce came in I was bound to get out of her where he was, but she and mamma and I did our prettiest to make you think that we were only worrying over Jim's health, when we all the time weren't sure that he mightn't be lying down there in some swamp with a bullet through him."

"Where was he?" cried Helen, with sudden curiosity. "It seems so incredible for a man to drop out of all knowledge for a fortnight that I have wondered two

or three times what became of him, and then have forgotten it."

To Helen's surprise a flood of color suddenly swept over Miriam Long's face. Zoë looked at her oddly a moment and then got up and began to move about the room, humming a little tune to herself as she examined some curios on the mantel-shelf.

"How is Mr. Trenholm?" asked Miriam. "I heard that it was a serious wound."

"Only a flesh wound," said Helen; "they say that he will be up and about in a week."

"I wish the doctor would send him off somewheres." Zoë's voice had an intentional drawl that caused both Helen and Miriam to turn toward her, but her head was bent low over a little figurine she was examining. "There's Ocean Bay, that's a mighty good place at this time of year; I wonder if Jim's ever heard of it?"

"I know he has," said Miriam, tranquilly.

Zoë glanced up from her figurine.

Miriam's flush had died away as suddenly as it came; she was quite pale. "Mr. Trenholm was down at Ocean Bay for two weeks in the autumn. Very likely it is the time you were asking about, Mrs. Thurston."

"She's mighty cool," thought Zoë, admiringly. "It would serve Jim Trenholm right if she didn't care a speck about him." She set the figurine back on the mantel-shelf. "Good-by, Tanagra! You've got a fine, level little head on your shoulders," she said, giving it a friendly nod. "It's about time for me to be going home again, Mrs. Thurston. You just give my love to the Professor. Are you coming my way, Miss Long?"

Miriam rose hesitatingly and left the house with Zoë; but she had no sooner reached the gate than she felt that she had made a mistake. "Good-by," she said, "our ways part here."

"They—they needn't," said Zoë; "there's a short cut to our house out your way."

"I think you would find that road very muddy."

"I wish it wasn't!" Zoë half offered her hand; but Miriam smiled and bowed and turned away.

"Good-by, Tanagra!" said Zoë, softly.

XXV

CRITICISM

CONTRARY to the expectation of his physician, Trenholm was not much better by the end of the week, and instead of going out and about Tallawara, the most he found himself able to accomplish during the early part of January was the short walk between his own house and Miss Locke's, where he spent the greater part of his time on the lounge, full of the dreary discontent that follows serious illness. The world looked gray, the future doubtful, and he felt the burden of an imaginary necessity to settle at once every question that ever had puzzled him as to the conduct of his affairs.

"Oh, go away! Go away!" cried Miss Locke one day. "If you stay here until February you will do some idiotic thing that will hamper you for the rest of your life."

"There is nothing idiotic in asking Zoë Mason to marry me."

"But there is in having her refuse you!" said Miss Locke, diplomatically. "Why don't you let the child alone? The Brinton affair has progressed astonishingly in the last two weeks—everybody is talking about it, and you really have no business to interfere. Brinton will make her far happier than you could!"

"I can't see why you say that! I am sure I could offer her a great deal more than Brinton."

"If you are thinking of doing it you had better make haste," said Miss Locke, with the air of one who knows her advice will not be taken.

"I will," said Trenholm, defiantly; and that afternoon he ordered Louis to harness the phaëton and drive him over to General Mason's.

Zoë was standing on the veranda. "What are you all doing here?" she inquired, not very hospitably, when Louis drew up at the step.

"Zoë Mason," said her mother's voice behind her, "you ask Jim to come in and rest."

Trenholm shook his head. "The doctor says I've got to stay out in the open air," he called. "Don't you think Miss Zoë might go driving with me?"

"Of course she can," said Mrs. Mason, with alacrity.

"Mamma, why don't you go with Jim?" said Zoë. "I, sure enough, haven't time this evening; I promised Mr. Brinton that I'd——"

"Never you mind Mr. Brinton, I'll settle him," said Mrs. Mason. "Go in and get your hat, and don't you keep Jim waiting."

Zoë was a long while getting ready. Mrs. Mason called twice without effect; a third summons becoming more urgent, Zoë appeared, her hat and coat in her hand.

Her mother took in the details of her toilet with a contemptuous "Humph! You almost took long enough to get ready for a ball, and yet you haven't even changed your collar!"

Trenholm, whose eye was more practised in shades

of expression than in details of dress, had a foreboding that the defiant carriage of Zoë's head and the flush on her cheek meant war.

"You'll have to drive you'self, Miss Zoë," said old Louis; "an' I hope you'll be mighty good an' careful not to shake Mars' Jim up by goin' licketty-split oveh ev'ry hump you see! We don't want no fast drivin' nor no racin', neither." The old man tucked the robe around her admiringly as he spoke. He had been heard to say that Miss Zoë was the only lady in town that he would be willing to see in old Madam's place.

"So you've been getting into mischief since I've been laid up," said Trenholm, as they drove out of the village.

"What under the sun do you mean?"

"I hear you've been getting engaged."

Zoë set her lips a little obstinately. "Who told you?"

"Never mind who told me,—is it true?"

"That depends on who you heard I was engaged to."

"Oh, Brinton, of course!"

"Pooh! They always have me engaged to Brinton, except when they——" she stopped and flushed; the old light-hearted make-believe between herself and Trenholm had of late become difficult.

"Except when they have you engaged to—me? But, then, I never objected to that," supplemented Trenholm, softly.

"It is time they stopped it, I'm getting too old for such nonsense!"

"How old are you? Twenty-one?"

"Yes; I'll be twenty-one next month."

" Getting on, aren't you?" Trenholm smiled at her, leaning lazily back in the corner of the seat. " Why, in the North you'd hardly be out of school."

" Southern girls are a heap brighter than that; they don't need such a mighty deal of schooling as Northern girls do. Why, I graduated years ago;—in more things than school, too!"

" Then it is settled? It is to be Brinton, after all?"

" Not if you object," said Zoë, with an impish languishing glance of her dark-lashed eyes. It was a dangerous game, but her head, at least, was cool.

Trenholm's thoughts turned back to his discussion with Miss Locke. After all, who could be more charming than Zoë! As time went on, he reflected, Tallawara would broaden; a more interesting class of people was beginning, already, to be attracted by the college.

" I'm not anxious to have you engaged to Brinton," he said.

Zoë looked at him swiftly, and as she turned her head away a little angry flush rose to her cheek. "Mr. Brinton is one of the best men here. You always know where you'll find him, and you always understand him; the girl that marries him is going to be a mighty lucky girl."

" So Miss Locke said."

" Isn't it about time Miss Locke was leaving for her native icebergs?" said Zoë, smoothly. " She seems to get kind of sour as soon as she begins to thaw out."

" We are not discussing Miss Locke. Do you think you are going to be happy shut up in a little corner of the world like Tallawara all your life?"

"If you think I'd be happy any place else, Jim Trenholm, you're mighty mistaken! I hope, if I'm spared," she spoke devoutly, "that I shall never in my life be compelled to set my foot out of my own country!"

"Tallawara is not quite the whole of your country."

"That's the way all the rest of the Yankees talk."

"Zoë!"

"Well, if you ain't a Yankee, what are you? You're certainly not a Southerner; why, you've forgotten how to speak!"

"You understand me well enough."

"I always had a talent for dialect."

"What possesses you this afternoon?"

"There it is again! Nothing possesses me this 'after-r-r-noon'; unless it is disgust at a man who can't say 'evening' when it is evening!"

"But it is not evening."

"I told you you'd forgotten!—And you don't write any better than you talk."

"What is wrong with the way I write?" he asked, with a good deal of irritation.

"Oh," said Zoë, explaining with the difficulty of a person who tries to steer between disagreeable truth and palatable politeness, "I have no doubt you write elegantly. Really, Jim, I'm not finding fault with the way you do it as much as with the things you do. There's a sort of confusion between right and wrong that just plain people down here can't understand; and when you get to splitting hairs, and talking up in the air, like you did in your last book, you can't expect it to interest us—we want something that has some meaning in it!"

"How do I split hairs? And where do I confuse right and wrong?"

"Oh, just in that horrid old *Captives!* It was a kind of surprise to have you write a book like that; I can't say I always expected you to write an interesting book, Jim, but I did think you'd write a proper one! Besides, it's so unnatural."

"I can't see, for the life of me, where the impropriety is!"

"Then I'll not commit the further impropriety of pointing it out to you."

"And as for its being unnatural—" began Trenholm.

"Perhaps it isn't unnatural," said Zoë, soothingly; "I reckon those people you write about are Northerners. They are, aren't they? I have never seen anyone like them round here."

"I have always flattered myself that my characters were true to nature."

"That's mighty funny!"

Trenholm tried to persuade himself that she was doing this to torment him.

"Now that last heroine of yours—what an awful goose she was!" continued Zoë. "Is that your ideal of a lovely woman?"

"I can't see why it mightn't be any man's ideal of a lovely woman!" said Trenholm, coldly. "It is,—yes, it certainly is,—mine."

"That's just it," Zoë spoke sadly, as if he had offered her additional facts in proof of some damaging theory; "you are so changed yourself, your ideas have got to be so different that you can't blame us if somehow

we don't feel very much in sympathy with them. Now, for instance, that woman—well—of course, Jim, no real Southern lady would consider it a compliment to be told she resembled a person like that, and I don't care what you say about ideals,—she's not a woman that any true Southern gentleman could really love."

"You don't know what you are talking about; that woman is drawn, line for line, from a person that a great many true Southern gentlemen have really loved, among others your humble servant."

"Someone in the North?" inquired Zoë, indifferently.

"No; in the South."

"Must be some girl from New Orleans."

"She lives here."

"I reckon it's Miss Long, then."

"If you had read the story with any care, you would have noticed that the heroine is a Southern girl, and that her hair was not red, it was golden."

"There's not a single golden-haired girl in Tallawara that answers to your description of that woman in *Captives!*" declared Zoë, positively.

"There may be a dark-haired girl."

"Is it a riddle? Like, 'black an' white an' red all over'?"

"The original of the heroine of *Captives* is a girl with dark hair, and dark eyes; she has——"

"Ah!" interrupted Zoë, with a sigh of relief, "that accounts for it!"

"Accounts for what?"

"For her being so unnatural! You see you made her a light-haired woman, but you haven't given her

the least bit of light-haired behavior; and then to go and dress her in clothes that only a dark-haired woman would wear," she turned and looked at him through her eye-lashes; "I can't think what made you so stupid, Jim!" she drawled.

Trenholm had been slowly losing his temper; it now bade fair to desert him altogether. "You are quite mistaken, I seldom mention clothes; but when I do I pride myself on having them right!"

"And you dress that woman up with big red roses in her hair and scarlet poppies in her belt and yellow party dresses, and dark red cloth cloaks, and, Oh—everything I might wear myself!"

"I have seen—light-haired women look superb in yellow party dresses."

"Well, your light-haired woman wouldn't! Who did you have in your mind, Jim? I advise you never to tell her; I suppose you truly meant it for Miss Ellen Anne Mills! Poor Miss Ellen Anne!"

"Oh, confound Miss Ellen!"

"I'm not going to tell her because I know it would hurt her feelings; she said at the sewing-circle the other day that if she hadn't read *Captives* she never would have believed that Jim Trenholm could create a shallow-pated, giddy-minded, flirting chit and hold her up to the world as a creature to be admired and imitated."

"If she said that she must have had a pretty shrewd idea of who it was meant for."

"And she said, too, that very likely you intended that character for a slap at the South; she'd seen girls in Tallawara who behaved exactly the same way.

Trenholm shrugged his shoulders.

"Aren't you going to tell *me* who it was meant for, Jim?" coaxed Zoë.

"Yes.—It was meant for you."

For an instant Zoë's clear, bold gaze faltered, she grew a little pale; and then, spurring herself gallantly: "Good gracious! I hope you haven't mentioned it to anyone else! I should never hear the end of it! Do you mean to say that that is the way I appear to you?" she cried.

All the while her mind was running back wildly to gather accurately what he had said:—it was a woman who might be any man's ideal! How much did he mean by that?

"There is very little danger of my telling anyone; I had not even meant to tell you."

Zoë sighed. "I think it was your duty," she said, pensively. "If you had paid me a compliment, now, behind my back, I wouldn't feel so; but when a man does a mean thing like that he sure-enough ought to own up.—I reckon we'd better go home."

She attempted to turn the buggy, but Trenholm put his hand on the reins. Zoë could see that it trembled.

"I am not going to turn back," he said, "until we have come to some understanding. I don't know what you mean by behaving in this way."

Zoë drove on in silence. Her charming face took on a sphinx-like, inscrutable smile; she was continuing the meditation she had begun in her own room at home while Trenholm and her mother waited. "I could make him ask me in five minutes," she reflected, "and get him all refused and off my mind in two more.

But—I'm not sure I want to—now;—besides," she looked at Trenholm, thoughtfully, "it wouldn't be a fair fight the way he is now."

They had already driven some distance, and Trenholm was leaning back in his corner looking tired and weak. "Zoë—" he began.

"Look here, Jim," said Zoë, decidedly, "your strength is to sit still. I'm going to turn this buggy round and go home, or I shall have you fainting right here on my hands. No wonder you don't get well any quicker, with nobody but old Louis to take care of you! Why don't you send for Ailsa? She always behaves herself when you're sick."

"She ought to have come without being sent for!" said Trenholm, pettishly.

"I reckon you all know where she is?"

"With her mother in Prestonpans," Louis said.

"No, she isn't; I sent word to Maisie Sterling to hunt her up, and Maisie wrote that Ailsa hadn't even been there."

Trenholm's brow darkened. "When did she go away?"

"She and Hannibal left Christmas night; but they didn't mean to leave."

"Why, you told me that she said she was going to a picnic with the other negroes."

"I know I did, but all the same she and Hannibal went off without expecting it; Christmas Day Aunt Clemmy came down with Paley and left him with us while she went and gave her testimony; the poor young-one had waked up all alone in the cabin with the door standing wide open; he had gone crying to

Clemmy before daylight, and she brought him to us because she was going to cook here for our dinner party."

"I'll go and see Clemmy."

"She won't tell you anything but——"

"But what?"

"Well, there's a report among the niggers that they are down at Gus Johnson's Crown County plantation."

"Down there with the convicts! It's impossible."

"Just what I said myself; but if it's true you'll have to get them away, Jim."

"There's nothing under the sun, now, to prevent their coming back whenever they want to."

"Yes," said Zoë, significantly, "but perhaps they don't know that. Hannibal's a mighty good hand and Gus Johnson won't want to give him up.—I wish I knew what sent them off that way."

"The less you say about it the better."

"Something's got to be done. You know mighty well that if they are down there they oughtn't to be allowed to stay, and if they're not there they ought to be looked up. And if somebody else can't do it I'll do it myself."

"It is rather a delicate matter, interfering with another man's negroes."

Zoë tossed her head. "I want Ailsa to do up my summer dresses," she said; "and I'm going to have her!"

They had come to the Masons' house. Old Louis, who was still waiting patiently on the steps, got up and hurried away as he saw them coming.

"I'll bet Louis knows where they are," said Zoë, as

the old man reappeared with a glass of eggnog for Trenholm.

"You drink all of that, Jim," said Mrs. Mason, coming out on the porch, "and let Louis get right in and drive you home. You look nearly tired to death."

Zoë stepped down from the phaëton, and, as if unconscious of anything but her own thoughts, stood looking up the road long after the trees had shut Trenholm from view.

"What under the sun have you and Jim been talking about?" said her mother, curiously.

Zoë did not turn her head. "I was telling him how stupid I thought his old book was."

"What book?"

"Oh,—*Captives!*"

"Zoë Mason! I'm surprised at you! Of all the mean tricks! You've been admiring that book ever since it came out and quarrelling with every friend you had on account of it. We haven't even dared mention it for fear you'd fly out at us, and then—you go and tell Jim Trenholm you thought it was stupid! What'll he think of you?"

"I'm sure I don't care what he thinks," said Zoë; "I wish he'd never been born!" She ran into the house and rushed up-stairs to her room, slamming the door behind her.

Mrs. Mason did not follow; she stepped to the edge of the porch, looked down the road, up at the sky, carefully investigated the state of the nearest japonica-tree, and then sighed regretfully.

XXVI

PROBATION

"ZOË MASON fixes up every night as if she was going to a party," the girls of her acquaintance declared; "she just does it to attract the men!" But the evening after her drive with Trenholm, Zoë had not given dress a thought. When she came down, belated, to her supper, she still remained in the light shirt-waist and dark blue skirt which she had worn in the afternoon. When supper was over, the General and Mrs. Mason followed Zoë out onto the veranda, and they had not been there long when Brinton came up the steps and sat down. The two older people left the younger ones alone, and went out to walk about the garden in the moonlight.

Although it was January, the weather was incredibly mild; the rank odor of the box in the borders filled the air with an earthy scent of spring. The unseasonable warmth was disturbing, and Brinton sat very quiet, feeling that he needed more than his usual self-control; while Zoë languidly rested her head against the pillar of the porch, and, looking into the sky beyond the thick dark foliage of the japonica-trees, thought of the afternoon. So she was the woman in *Captives!* "The woman that a great many Southern gentlemen had really loved—*including your humble servant!*"

Of course it was only Jim's way, and now the whole struggle was to be gone over again! How many times had she been through it before! Jim had not meant it! Why could she not forget that he had said it?

In the hurrying throng of memories Brinton was almost forgotten; he rose, as if to remind her, and came and placed himself a step or two below her, leaning his chin upon his hand and looking up into her face. He was a little pale, a little sad, and so absent-minded that Mrs. Mason confided to her husband, out in the shrubbery, that she did hope Brinton would know enough not to address Zoë right now, because he'd be, sure enough, refused. But he had no mind to put his fortunes to the test, and, as he looked at Zoë and saw the weary droop of her lips, the self-forgetfulness of her dress and attitude, and the slight pained drawing together of the corners of her eyelids, his brow darkened and his heart grew hot within him.

"So he's been at it again!" He spoke softly, altogether dropping for the time his usual teasing manner.

Zoë raised her head; her first impulse was to challenge him; and then, guided by something that she could not explain, she put aside every defence and answered, "Yes."

"What has he done?"

"Nothing; nothing at all. He just makes me unhappy."

"Why do you allow him?"

Zoë leaned her head back against the pillar again and looked up into the sky. "Why? How can I tell? There is no why. He does it."

Brinton drew a long breath. "Why do you tell me of it?" he asked, suddenly.

"I haven't told you; you found out, and I thought it would be unfair to deny it."

In Brinton's heart there was a sudden welling up of honor and loyalty unlike anything he had ever felt for Zoë before. He had loved her and meant to win her; now all he cared for was that she should be happy. "What does he do?" he asked. "How does he make you unhappy?"

"Oh," wearily, "I reckon he flirts."

"I have never observed that flirtation made you unhappy in other cases," said Brinton, a little dryly.

"In other cases I don't care."

"Zoë! You don't care now! You can't—you must not!"

"All right," she said, "I don't, then! I'll take your word for it. I reckon I'm too tired to know this evening whether I care or not." She roused herself to something of her old manner and looked at him wickedly. "I couldn't repel such sympathy as you have been offering me for the last fifteen minutes, Mr. Brinton,—it really would seem unkind."

Brinton listened to this new flippancy without any answering gibe, and continued to sit, his elbow on the porch and his chin in his hand, looking up at her sadly and thoughtfully.

"That won't go down, Miss Zoë," he said, at last, with a little sigh. "You can't deceive me; when you are unhappy I know it, and when you're happy I know it; and there's no use of your pretending that what you said a few minutes ago was just put on to fool

and torment me. You did me the honor to be in earnest then, and I'm not going to let you take it back. I suppose I can't help you. When it comes to things like this we have each of us got to walk alone; but wherever you do walk, whether it be in sunshine or in shadow, my heart follows you. I think it's very likely that we never again may find a moment like this, and it's too precious to let it pass. You can't laugh me away, this evening, and you can't answer me with a joke. You've got to listen to what I say; you know I mean it, and you won't forget. I'll stand aside, after this, and we can go on in the old way as if I had never spoken and you had never heard; but whatever comes or whenever it comes, I'm always at your call. I'm just your servant, Miss Zoë, your tool. You can pick me up when you need me, and you can throw me away when I am useless. You may even come back to me again after you have once discarded me, for, no matter what happens,—I am yours!"

"I don't feel as if I ought to let you take this attitude," she said.

"You can't help yourself. I have not given you the option of letting or of refusing to let me. I've merely stated a fact: here I am, and here I shall always be."

Zoë made no reply, but every word that he had spoken had borne its own strength and comfort. Hitherto the thought of Brinton's affection had been a source of irritation; suddenly all this feeling dropped away; she stretched out her hand impulsively. Brinton took it and held it tightly, even masterfully; a con-

sciousness that he might keep it was beginning to dawn upon him.

"But I can't give you any assurance that I shall change," said Zoë, faltering a little.

"Have I asked for assurances?"

"No:—but it doesn't seem fair."

"That's my lookout."

"But I oughtn't to let it go that way. I'm really taking from you," she said; but she did not withdraw her hand.

Brinton's eyelids sank, he was afraid that she might read in the sudden widening of the pupils and dilation of the irises something that he felt the hour had not yet come to show. His head buzzed and his ears rang. "*Steady, Brinton,*" he told himself. "Steady!"

Then calmly, with a little friendly pat, he laid Zoë's hand upon her lap, and half turning from her drew a cigarette from his pocket, and asked permission to smoke.

General Mason and his wife came up the steps. "She has taken him," said Mrs. Mason, when they got into the house. "Did you see his face?"

"No, she hasn't," said the General. "I was looking at her; she was thinking of somebody else!"

XXVII

DISCIPLINE

THE day after Brinton's visit Zoë's spirits rose again. What, after all, was Trenholm to her, she said, with a little toss of the head, or Brinton, or anybody else! And, at the approach of evening, she went out to the pit and gathered a generous bouquet of all of her mother's best flowers with which she made herself and the house beautiful.

"I'm glad to see you looking like a Christian again," said Mrs. Mason, when Zoë appeared at supper, brilliant in scarlet ribbons and black lace. "Who's coming?"

"Val Sterling's here," said the General; "he came up from Prestonpans this evening. I saw him at the drug-store and asked him down to supper, but he said he was most too busy."

A faint little smile curled the corners of Zoë's lips, but she devoted herself to her fried chicken and hot flapjacks. The General insisted on flapjacks three times a day, and while Mrs. Mason and Zoë protested, they always partook.

"I reckon any kind of old rags are good enough for poor Mr. Brinton," said Mrs. Mason; "but just let Valentine Sterling appear in town and Zoë sticks on the best she has."

"It doesn't seem to be doing her much good this time," said the General.

"When Zoë Mason puts on that look of the cat that's been at the cream, somebody's coming," said her mother. "And you might as well own up, Zoë, for we're bound to find out some time this evening. But, I'll just tell you this, if you go on wearing all your best dresses so early in the season you'll not have a thing left for summer."

Mrs. Mason made the mistake of saying too much; it left room for a judicious selection in the matter of replies. "I'll get something else as soon as this is gone," Zoë said.

"You must think your poor father's made of money!"

"He likes to see me looking nice, even if you don't."

"That depends on the expenses," said the General.

"And there you've been and gone and picked all those Jack roses of mine," said Mrs. Mason, disgustedly. "I was going to send the bush to the church on Sunday. It's downright sacrilegious of you, Zoë Mason! I haven't had a decent flower to send for a month, and Mrs. Yarnell's just been lavishing things."

"Let her lavish!" said Zoë, generously. "She hasn't anything better to do with them!"

The General laughed.

"William James Mason, I'm plumb ashamed of you!" said his wife.

"Who's saying 'plumb' now?" said Zoë. "It's a good thing Mrs. Thurston isn't here — she'd be shocked at you, mamma!"

"If Val Sterling's going to be in to-night, I want

to see him," said the General, hastily. "And, by the way, Zoë, a girl might do worse than take Val."

"A girl might do worse than take a good many people,—and she might do better." And having finished her flapjacks Zoë sailed from the room.

About half an hour later Valentine Sterling made his appearance: "There now, Miss Zoë, I hope you're satisfied," he said. "I came all the way from Prestonpans to see you, and for a reward I'm most starved; but you told me I was not to appear until seven, and I didn't. I don't think the General understood when I refused to come down to tea because I was too busy; he knew perfectly well I hadn't a single thing to do; it was right embarrassing, I shouldn't wonder if he challenged me to fight."

"Why didn't you bring Maisie?" said Zoë.

"I would have if I'd thought I'd have got some supper by it; but we're expecting you down in Prestonpans next week, and mamma thought Maisie might as well stay at home for a change.—Well, which is ahead now, Brinton or Jim? You ought to have a bulletin put out at the drug-store, Miss Zoë, the way they do at the ball-games in the cities. It would be fairer to the rest of us."

"Look here, Val Sterling! You're presuming on being the brother of my best friend, and I warn you to just quit your impertinence or you'll get into trouble."

"Like poor Jim did!" said Val, compassionately. "I knew you were mighty vindictive, Miss Zoë, but I never thought you'd set Brinton on to sticking a knife in a man just for a little joke."

Zoë was instantly grave. "You'd better look out, sure enough, Val; jokes of that kind are not popular just now; there's a lot of quiet, ugly feeling down below in Tallawara, and Mr. Brinton wouldn't think that was funny if he heard it—and—neither would you."

"Who do you reckon did it, anyhow? Haven't you got any clew yet?"

"Not that I know of."

"This is the slowest old place I ever lighted on; down in Prestonpans we'd have sifted the whole thing out long ago!"

"Everybody believes that Gus Johnson was at the bottom of it."

"Well, I don't," said Sterling. "For one thing, if it had been Gus Johnson, they'd have caught him; he's strong enough, but he's fat, and he couldn't run down to the Guthrie mansion in that time, ahead of the dogs. Besides, those dogs were nigger dogs, they wouldn't be tracking a white man."

"Pooh! Gus Johnson's different. He isn't white like other men."

"It's queer, too, that Jim doesn't try to follow it up," said Valentine, speculatively.

"I reckon he's got some good reason,—but it is queer. He says he believes he was mistaken for another man."

"Well, he ought to follow it up for the sake of that other man, then; how do I know it isn't me? It's not comfortable thinking that somebody's lurking 'round every dark corner ready to run a knife into you."

"You must think you're mighty important! I'm

not afraid of people waiting 'round corners to run knives into me. Why, nobody'd take the trouble to kill you, even if you asked them!"

"When I'm going to ask I'll select my man mighty carefully; I'll tell you that much!"

"All right," said Zoë, tossing her head incredulously. "If you happen to make a mistake I'll go into mourning."

"Widow's mourning," stipulated Val.

"Any kind you like; it'll be a pleasure to me!" she said, obligingly. "By the way," she went on, suddenly dropping the subject. "Has Maisie heard anything of Ailsa yet?"

"Ailsa? Is that the tall yellow woman that works here sometimes?"

"Yes. She married that big black Hannibal that used to work for your father when you lived here in Tallawara."

"Oh, I know the woman right enough," said Sterling, "she's—" he stopped. His further identification he found was not quite proper for Zoë's ears. "Why, the last time I saw her," he went on hastily, "was the day after Christmas, or rather, the night after Christmas. I was coming home late and met these two on the road."

"Where were they going?"

"They didn't say, but they had a pair of about the finest mules I ever saw, with them. Anybody lost a pair of mules around here?"

"No; but what were the mules like?"

"A kind of gray, almost fawn-colored;—mighty handsome!"

"And Hannibal and Ailsa were taking them somewhere? Oh, Valentine, couldn't you find out where they went?"

"Any reason for their running away?"

"None whatever, at least none that anybody knows about."

"What do you suspect?"

"I can't say. At first I didn't think anything, but now it begins to seem queer; they've been gone nearly three weeks. They left all their things in their house, as if they meant to come home the next morning, and—" she made a little gesture with her hand, "that is the end of them."

"They'll turn up again. Darkies always do, unless there's some special reason for wishing to disappear. If you think its of importance I could inquire for you; perhaps I could track them."

"I wish you would. I've always been fond of Ailsa. She has worked here off and on ever since I was a baby, and Hannibal has been on the place somewhere or other for years."

"Couldn't you give me a hint as to what you think's happened to them; some clew?"

Zoë hesitated. "It's a mere suspicion," she said at last, "but I'm afraid that they've gone off to work on Gus Johnson's Crown County plantation."

It was Valentine's turn to hesitate. "Oh, look here, Miss Zoë," he remonstrated, "you know I can't interfere with another man's hands. It would never do for me to be nosing round in Gus Johnson's affairs; first thing I knew I'd get a bullet in me."

"I wish you would!" said Zoë, impatiently.

"You're always expecting one so hard that it must be kind of disappointing when it never comes. Besides, I'm not asking you to nose 'round in anybody's affairs; as soon as you trace those niggers to the edge of that Crown County plantation you can stop; anything I want to know after that I can find out for myself."

Valentine shook his head. "It won't do, Miss Zoë; if they've hired out to Johnson they have, and it's nobody's business. Really, you mustn't ask me to meddle. There are reasons why I shouldn't, reasons that I can't explain. It seems to me it's all very simple; what makes you so anxious?"

"For one thing I am anxious because Gus Johnson wants to keep it secret. I asked him about those very mules not long ago. They were pastured here in the lot behind our house until Christmas Day, and if he'd sent Hannibal and Ailsa off with them, why didn't he say so?"

"There's nothing Johnson likes so well as a mystery; he'd make one out of his little finger-nail if he could. Sounds more important."

"All right," said Zoë, petulantly, "if you all ain't going to help me, I'll just have to find out for my own self!"

Valentine drummed his foot on the floor a moment, whistled a little tune, and finally turning to Zoë spoke impressively. "Now, Miss Zoë," he said, "I am going to speak to you plainly; the less you inquire about Gus Johnson and these two negroes the better. There are things no lady should meddle with, and you'll have to take my word for it that this is one of them. You

might hit on somebody else that would misunderstand you seriously, Miss Zoë."

But this solemn remonstrance made very little difference to Zoë. "What for would Hannibal and Ailsa be wanting to go working on that old Crown County plantation," she cried, "with a lot of murderers and jail-birds, when they have a nice comfortable home here and plenty to do?"

Valentine had fixed his eyes about two inches above Zoë's head, his face took on a wooden expression, and for a moment or two there was dead silence in the room.

"Valentine Sterling," said Zoë, peremptorily, "are you going to answer me or ain't you?"

"I am not going to open my mouth about this thing again!" said Valentine, positively.

"Well, you've as good as promised to hunt them up for me already!"

Valentine opened his mouth as if to deny the promise, and then closed it again, still continuing with his eyes fixed above Zoë's head.

"It would be a comfort," said Zoë, inconsequently, "if we could find the real truth about the person that stabbed—" Here she put her hand over her mouth.

Valentine moved uneasily.

"But I see now," she went on in sad, firm tones, "that there's nothing left for me to do but to try and get it out of Gus Johnson himself. The next time I see him I'll ask him just what he's done with those niggers, and let him know that there's somebody that's looking out for them."

Valentine's face had grown very red and his eyes began to glitter; but he had made up his mind that no further word on this subject would he speak, and he was holding to it, manfully, although it was a sore struggle.

A few moments of weighty silence followed. The two had been sitting side by side on a low sofa at one end of the room.

"Valentine Sterling," said Zoë, angrily, "will you speak, or won't you?"

"I'd be delighted to speak, Miss Zoë,—about the weather."

"I don't want to hear about the weather! I want you to tell me whether you are going to do what you promised and find out if Ailsa and Hannibal are working on that Crown County plantation."

Valentine's face at once resumed its stony expression.

Zoë sat looking at him, and as the silence prolonged itself from one minute to two, from two to five, from five to ten, she grew more and more angry. The clock in the hall struck nine; a faint, provoking smile crept around the young man's lips. The tormenting expression in his eyes became insupportable; all at once the room resounded with a sharp smack: Zoë had boxed Valentine's ear with all her force.

Valentine, without further ado, threw his arm around her waist and kissed her. "There! You know you deserved it!"

"Valentine Sterling! You go away from here, and never come back again as long as you live:—as long as you live!"

"It was only fair play," Valentine protested; "but I tell you, Miss Zoë, if you haven't got 'a mighty hand and an outstretched arm,' I don't know who has! I shall be deaf for a month."

"I hope you will! And dumb, too!"

"I was dumb a little while ago, and you didn't seem to like it; and as for being deaf, I assure you I didn't hear you send me home just now."

At this moment General Mason came into the room, and Valentine, taking a mean advantage of his presence, stayed on for an hour longer. When he had gone the General turned and looked at Zoë curiously. "Why, daughter," he drawled, "did you ever notice that funny birth-mark Val Sterling has on the side of his face? It's shaped kind o' like a paw!"

But Zoë disrespectfully flounced out of the room.

XXVIII

AN EXPLORER

THE next morning as Valentine Sterling stood in the window of the apothecary shop he saw Zoë driving slowly up the street in her phaëton; suddenly he whipped a large white silk handkerchief out of his pocket, doubled it into a broad fold, and passing it under his chin tied it by the corners on the top of his head.

"Why, Val, what's the matter?" said Brinton, who was buying a box of candy at the counter.

Valentine winked and walked back to the window again. "Do you reckon Miss Zoë's going to come in here?" he asked.

"I don't believe she is," said Brinton, for the young ladies of Tallawara seldom stopped at the apothecary's.

"Then I'll just hop in next door," said Valentine. "She's stopping there."

Brinton picked up his box of candy and followed; something in Valentine's manner promised amusement.

"Good-morning, Miss Zoë," said Valentine, in suffering tones, as he took off his hat, displaying the large white bow beneath.

Zoë's lips twitched. "Good-morning, I hope you haven't hurt yourself," she said, coldly.

"No, I haven't hurt myself, but I have been hurt. Mighty bad, too; I'm afraid I ain't going to get over it in a 'coon's age!" At this minute Brinton drew near. "I was just telling Miss Zoë," said Valentine, looking at him solemnly, "about my broken jaw."

"Yes; he's had it in splints all night. The real danger of these cases,"—Brinton, having gone through a medical school, spoke with authority—"is starvation. Poor Val hasn't been able to eat anything for twenty-four hours."

Zoë laughed outright. "Twenty-four hours?"

"You are mistaken, Brinton," said Sterling; "I got this injury at exactly nine o'clock last night."

"I'm not mistaken in saying that you can't eat, anyhow," said Brinton. "Miss Zoë, may I offer you some candy?" He uncovered the box as he spoke.

"I'm mighty sorry, but I can't eat it, either," said Zoë, who had an aversion to accepting anything Brinton offered her in the presence of others; "but it will come in nicely for little Carrie Lou Magill. I promised her some candy last week if she'd be a good child while her mother was sewing for us; if you don't mind, I'll take it to her right away. I'd ask you to come with me, Mr. Sterling," she said, gathering up her reins, "but, of course, a man with a broken jaw ought really to be at home in bed."

"It seems to me, Miss Zoë," said Brinton, "that you might ask me; if you're going to give that box of candy to Carrie Lou, I ought to be allowed to see it reach its destination."

Zoë tossed her head. Brinton's request sounded as if he had some doubts as to whether she really meant

to carry out her proposal. She moved over and allowed him to climb into the phaëton beside her.

"We'll drive over to the Mission school," she said, turning the horse. She was not at all averse to going there; it had been surprising how many of her walks and drives of late had taken her in that direction; but when they reached the school-house they found it empty and only a few children lingering in the neighborhood. Carrie Lou, they said, had gone home to the Mission with Miss Simmons.

Zoë listened, a look of determination coming into her face. "This candy must be delivered," she said; "we are going to the Mission."

Brinton remonstrated. "Look here, Miss Zoë, there's no need of your going up there; I will see to it that the young one gets enough candy to kill her, if you'll only let me take you home!"

"I reckon I can see to it just as well as you can," said Zoë, "and it's only a little farther." She gave the horse a cut with the whip, they rattled down the hill and up again and swept around the driveway in front of the Longs' door. The turn brought Zoë on the side of the carriage next to the house. Her heart beat quite tumultuously. It was the first time she had ever been in the place. In fact, it was the first time that any white woman in Tallawara had ever come beyond the gateway.

Zoë waited a minute, and Brinton sat very grim at her side, offering no help. "I reckon you all might as well get out and ring the bell," she suggested.

"No; I'm answerable to your father for this, and I'm not going to do anything to further you in it."

"All right, then, I'll get out and ring myself!" She jumped as she spoke, but the hanging string of a parcel in the bottom of the phaëton caught her foot; she stumbled and fell to the porch. Brinton sprang after her. Zoë seated herself on the lower step, looking up at him with angry, sparkling eyes; suddenly she stooped and clasped her foot in her hand.

"Oh," she said, "I've sprained my ankle! I'll have to go in and have it seen to before I can go home."

At this moment the door opened and Miriam Long came toward them.

"Miss Long," said Zoë, "I reckon I'm going to make you a heap of trouble. I came up here trying to find little Carrie Lou Magill, and, when I got out of the phaëton to ring the bell, there wasn't anybody to help me, so I stumbled and sprained my ankle."

Miriam turned her head toward Brinton and half smiled, and, at this look, in which, for the moment, all the awkwardnesses and difficulties of her position were forgotten, Brinton's hat came off, automatically.

"Oh, Mr. Brinton!" said Zoë, in accents of surprise. "Are you really there? Miss Long, may I introduce Mr. Brinton? I beg your pardon for not asking your permission beforehand, Miss Long, but so long as Mr. Brinton has concluded to be present, I couldn't avoid introducing him; if you want to cut him the next time you meet him you can."

"Your ankle must be hurting you severely," said Miriam. "If you'll come into the house I will have it bandaged."

Zoë picked up her candy, and, supporting herself on Miriam's arm, hobbled away.

"There are no stairs to climb, fortunately; my room is at the end of this hall."

The hall at the Mission was covered with a clean, bright oil-cloth, and there were one or two brilliant carpet rugs in the middle of the floor. Zoë caught glimpses of maps of divers missionary districts as she passed, and she heard from a neighboring room Miss Simmons's voice in gentle dictatorial tones, plainly teaching the rudiments of waiting on the table to Carrie Lou; there was nothing formidable in sight, but Zoë was in the midst of a forbidden country, and began to be frightened; she was not sure what might happen, and feared all sorts of compromising situations.

Miriam left her in a large light room, which looked toward the south and west. The high walls had been coaxed to appear less high by some clever device in paint and paper, and the old hard pine floor had been waxed until it shone again. Around the sides the low bookcases that Miriam had used in college were filled with books. A little brass bedstead in one corner was covered with blue and white dimity, the rugs on the floor were of blue and white Japanese cotton and a tiny tea-service stood on a table near the fireplace. At the other end of the room was a wide desk on the top of which stood a blue and white bowl filled with flowers; Zoë looked around her, filled with surprise, which she tried to disguise in a short embarrassed laugh, when Miriam returned, followed by a colored woman bringing the cans of hot water.

The woman nodded. "Howdy, Miss Zoë, honey, you done sprained your ankle bad, I heah," she said, with the half-familiar respectfulness of the negro.

"Now you all lemme take off youah stockin'. Which foot is it?"

"It's this one," putting out her left foot. "Oh, no it isn't, it's this one," and she thrust forth the other.

Miriam, who had been getting some towels on the other side of the room, came forward to examine the ankle as the woman took off Zoë's shoe. "What a little foot!" she said, touching the ankle carefully to find the swelling. "It doesn't seem to me that it can be very much swollen. Here, Louisa, you hold it while I pour on the water."

Zoë bore the hot stream as long as she could, then she began to protest. "Ouch!" she cried, while Louisa giggled and held firmly to the foot.

Miriam's lip quivered, but she continued to pour. "It must be almost boiled," she said, looking up.

"I'm not going to stand it another minute!" cried Zoë.

Miriam knelt before her and gravely bandaged the fraudulent member.

"You'll never get her shoe on over all that, Miss Miriam!" said Louisa. "Better lend her a pair of your slippers."

As Miriam went to the closet to find something looser Louisa stooped to carry away the large blue and white bowl in which they had been bathing the foot: for a moment Zoë was left alone. She glanced about her, and then, taking out her pocket-book, slipped it hastily under the cushion of the chair upon which she was sitting, just as Miriam returned with the slippers. She put them on and then with surprising agility got up and moved toward the front door.

They found Brinton driving impatiently around the gravel oval in front of the house; he sprang down to help Zoë into the carriage, but she jumped in easily without assistance.

"I reckon you are suffering most as much pain as a person with a broken jaw!" he said.

With a little gesture that he involuntarily obeyed Zoë waved him aside.

"Thank you, Mr. Brinton!" she cried, driving away with a clatter of wheels. "Don't bother; you just go back to the drug-store and take care of Valentine Sterling! He needs you a heap more than I do."

XXIX

PREPARATIONS

BRINTON met Zoë Mason walking lightly and quickly up the main street the following morning, and congratulated her upon the heroic fortitude by which she was enabled to disguise the painful effects of her yesterday's accident. "What you all doing up here so early in the morning, anyhow?" he inquired, walking along beside her.

"Oh, I've been to the dressmaker's, and I'm on my way to meet mamma at Bingham's now, to do some more shopping. I'm getting ready to go away."

Brinton looked at her in consternation. "Going away! What for?"

"For fun."

"When are you going?"

"Next week."

"Where?" Considerations of false delicacy never restrained Brinton from gratifying his legitimate curiosity.

"I'm going down to Prestonpans to visit Maisie Sterling."

"I vow, I'd like to punch Val Sterling's head!"

"What for?"

"For not telling me."

"How could he tell you when I'd warned him not

to? Nobody knows. I'm laying out to surprise the town."

"It isn't much of a surprise," said Brinton, ruefully.

"Well, don't you go spoiling it—you're not to tell a soul!" Zoë enjoyed ruffling the quiet omniscience of Tallawara by unexpected departures and returns.

"There's your mother now," said Brinton, as Mrs. Mason's phaëton drew up in front of the shop next to the drug-store. They were but a few feet away from her and Zoë hurried to the curb-stone.

"You can just make them bring all your things here, Zoë Mason. If you think I'm going to get out you're mighty mistaken," said her mother.

"Don't you want me to go in with you, Miss Zoë, and help you choose?" said Brinton.

"No; you just stay where you are."

Brinton leaned over the wheel, talking to Mrs. Mason, and from time to time Zoë and a perspiring clerk appeared at the edge of the carriage, with rolls of goods for discussion and approbation.

"My gracious!" said Brinton, "you're buying enough stuff for a trousseau. Now this white satin here doesn't look like anything else in the world but a wedding-gown; if I was you I wouldn't buy it for her, Mrs. Mason. If you get her all prepared this way she'll be slipping off and marrying some fellow before you know it."

"Oh, I'm not afraid of that," said Mrs. Mason. "Zoë's made up her mind that she's never going to be married without a veil, and white slippers, and her grandfather's diamond shoe-buckles, and I keep those locked away in her papa's secretary."

"You're safe enough this time, then," said Zoë, "for I haven't got any veil, either, and there isn't a pair of white slippers my size to be had in town."

"What is your size?" asked Brinton.

"Just the same as yours," said Zoë, planting an infinitesimal foot by the side of his; "thirteen and a half."

"Zoë Mason," said her mother, "I think that's downright insulting!"

"Seems to me," said Brinton, "that it oughtn't to be so very hard to get a shoe for a little foot like that."

"Oh, the shoemaker's got my number all right," said Zoë, "but they're too wide."

Brinton looked extremely thoughtful, as if he were making a mental note of something, and when Mrs. Mason had driven off to the dressmaker's with the white gown, he resumed his walk by Zoë's side.

"I reckon I'll be coming down to Prestonpans before long," he said.

"We don't want everybody in Tallawara coming down there!" said Zoë, discontentedly.

"You needn't be alarmed, I'd like to give Tallawara a little surprise myself, for that matter; I wouldn't mind giving it a big one, either! There's nothing stingy about me," said Brinton, with sudden animation.—"Are you going in here to get the wedding-veil?"

"No, they keep the wedding-veils over at Johnson's; I'll have to get that some other day. I'm going in here to get something that I don't need any advice about, so you'd better just walk along by yourself."

Brinton had the preoccupied look of a man who

is following some private scheme of his own; he raised his hat absently, and after Zoë had disappeared in the shop waited a few minutes, and then walked straight to Johnson's store. "I want some mosquito-bar," he said.

Johnson, who was behind the counter that morning, handed him down a roll of bright pink netting.

"No, that won't do, I want it white and thinner. It's meant for a mighty small mosquito."

"I haven't got anything much finer, unless you buy some dress goods."

"Let's see them!" But when the materials were shown him he examined them discontentedly, pronouncing them unfit for his purpose.

"Why, man," said Johnson, "a mosquito-bar any finer than this would cost you a fortune! There isn't such a thing."

"I tell you, you must have something! Show me all the thin things you have, and when I see what I want I'll sing out."

"Why don't you buy a wedding-veil?" said Johnson, derisively.

"All right, trot out your wedding-veil."

Johnson handed down a small package of fine, lace-like material, which Brinton eyed with approval. "I reckon that'll do," he said; "you can give me about fifteen feet of it."

"It's not what you want at all; it tears if you look at it, and it's expensive, too."

"I reckon I'm paying for it, Johnson, and not you," said Brinton, good-humoredly; "you just cut off fifteen feet; that ought to be enough."

"It's too much for a wedding-veil and not enough for a bed," said Johnson, cutting the goods reluctantly.

"Now you fold it up and put it in some decent box."

Johnson dived under the counter and appeared with a box.

"Oh, I've got to have a better box than that!"

"Here is a fancy one for holding handkerchiefs, how will that do?"

Brinton went through the whole assortment, rejecting box after box, until Johnson sarcastically suggested that he'd better go and buy a gold one at the jeweller's.

"Very well, you just hold on to that mosquito-bar until I come back."

Johnson drummed thoughtfully on the counter, and when Brinton returned with a jewel-case that the jeweller had tried in vain to dispose of for years, his curiosity overpowered him. "Look here, Brinton, what you going to do with this, anyhow?"

But Brinton folded his tulle into the jewel-case, and, after locking it carefully, left the store without making any revelations. His next journey was to the shoe-store, where he ordered a pair of slippers,—for his sister,—of a size narrower than the only white satin ones the shoemaker had. "They've got to be ready by the first of week after next," he said.

In the meantime Zoë, who had not been able to make her purchases satisfactorily at the shop where Brinton had left her, went on to Johnson's. It was a place that she seldom entered, so great was her dislike of the proprietor, and Johnson greeted her now

with his usual elaborate and displeasing courtesy. "What a beautiful morning we are having, Miss Zoë! The summer will be on us before we know it; in fact, people are getting ready for it now," he added, laughing, as he remembered Brinton's purchase. "Brinton was just in here buying a mosquito-bar, and he's grown so mighty particular that there wasn't anything suited him in my whole stock except a wedding-veil. —I reckon Brinton'll look interesting, snoozing away under a wedding-veil."

"Good-morning, Mr. Johnson!" snapped Zoë, and she walked swiftly out of the store.

Johnson looked after her ill-humoredly. "She's mighty squeamish all at once," he said to himself. "I reckon there isn't any such killing impropriety in mentioning Brinton in bed that she should go off in a fury like that!"

Zoë stood on the steps of Johnson's store and looked in bewilderment up and down the street. "Of all the impertinence!" she murmured, and started toward home, quite forgetting her engagement at the dressmaker's until she had gone more than a quarter of a mile out of the way.

"I've got the greatest mind to send this liberty satin back!" she said to her mother, whom she found waiting for her in the dressmaker's parlor.

"If you did it would be the first sign of good-sense I've seen in you for the last six months!" said Mrs. Mason.

"Would it?" Zoë spoke with anxious gravity.

"Of course it would!"

Zoë went to the window and drummed undecidedly

on the glass; behind her in the dim little room the dressmaker was gathering the shimmering material in long folds and making little sounds of rapture. "Do quit, Mrs. Osborne," said Zoë, impatiently; "I can't hear myself think!"

There was a long period of waiting.

"Well?" said Mrs. Mason, expectantly.

"Well," echoed Zoë, still with her back to them, "I reckon I'd be a bigger fool than I ever have been yet if I didn't keep it and just run the risk!"

"May the Lord grant me patience, for the stock I have by nature's completely worn out with your nonsense, Zoë Mason!"

"Now, mamma! Indeed and double I didn't mean to be provoking," pleaded Zoë. "It wasn't just nonsense; it was——"

"I'm not going to wait and see what it was! I've wasted enough time to-day; and I've got more to do for you than I can possibly finish before next week. You can settle that dress with Mrs. Osborne your own self!"

Mrs. Mason drove off, and after soberly arranging the details of her gown, Zoë walked through the village toward home; as she came to her own gate she saw Miriam Long hurrying toward her.

"I have come to bring you this pocket-book," she said; "you left it on the chair in my room."

Zoë laughed significantly as she took it, and half opened the gate.

Miriam drew back.

"Aren't you coming in to return my call?" asked Zoë.

"I can't possibly; I must hurry home if I want to get any dinner before this afternoon's school."

"Oh, never mind the school; the rest of them can teach it just as well as you can."

"But I am the only one there. Miss Simmons has gone over to Prestonpans to meet my father and Miss Edwards, who are coming home to-morrow from the North."

"And you're going to have your dinner all by yourself?" Zoë asked, curiously.

"There is nobody to have it with me."

Zoë gave a short sigh of relief. "Don't hurry," she remonstrated as Miriam began to move away.

"I have no time to spare because I am going to cook my own dinner on the chafing-dish."

"You needn't run, anyhow!" said Zoë, following. "I'll walk along a piece with you."

Miriam was brought to bay. "Are you sure you know what you are doing?"

"Yes, I am, and it's time that such nonsense was put a stop to," said Zoë, inwardly commenting that she knew far better what she was doing than Miriam herself. "I wouldn't be so proud if I was you," she added. "I don't see how Mrs. Thurston is so much better than me, and you've been out with her ever so many times."

"Only two or three," said Miriam, hurrying on. "My father disapproved of it, and Miss Locke too. She seemed to think that it was hardly fair to Mrs. Thurston, she being from the North, and liable to be misunderstood."

"All right, I'm not from the North, and as for being

misunderstood, I'm used to it. Tallawara would turn blue moldy if it couldn't keep up its circulation misunderstanding me."

Miriam had taken a back way that led across the outskirts of the town toward the Mission, and as they reached a place in the road where a small spring seemed to have broken through the bank at the side, she stopped again. "You can't get over this without sinking into this red clay above your ankles; you really must turn back!"

"No, sir! I'm coming along with you. We're going to have our dinner out of that chafing-dish together!"

"But I can't allow it! If you follow me I shall not ask you in."

"All right, then, I'll walk in without being asked! You know you want me," said Zoë, with a charming smile. "We're going to be friends, I tell you. I made you a present of my affections on Christmas Day."

At this moment the two girls heard a sound of voices across a ploughed field to their left, and three or four young men came toward them, their guns in their hands. As they reached the rail-fence that separated the field from the road, the foremost set his gun down and jumped over, then stood astonished at seeing Zoë and Miriam together there in this unfrequented spot.

"Good-morning, Danny Wilson," said Zoë, "have you had any luck?"

"Good-morning," said Danny Wilson, gravely.

Miriam moved on quickly through the watery road;

the other three young men came up to the fence and stood leaning over it, but Wilson ran down the bank at the side, toward Zoë. "Is there anything I can do, Miss Zoë?" he said. "We've been wondering who was with you ever since we caught sight of you. I hope nobody has been annoying you."

All the generosity in Zoë's heart was fired at this injustice. "On the contrary, I have been having a delightful walk with Miss Long.—Miss Long!" she called; "Miss Long!"

But Miriam walked on steadily, without turning. She hoped to reach the corner, thinking that when she had passed from sight Zoë would relinquish pursuit.

"If you'll take my advice, Miss Zoë," said Wilson, "you'll let her alone. Those people are not fit company for you to associate with."

"Fit for me to associate with!" cried Zoë, indignantly. "So far as I can see it is just the other way; I've been begging her to let me come home to dinner with her and she won't hear of it!"

Zoë ran on after Miriam, calling as she went, and Wilson climbed up the bank toward his companions.

"See that girl making Miss Zoë wade through the mud after her!" he said, angrily. "It isn't natural, it looks like she'd put a regular hoodoo on Miss Zoë, and that's what I believe she has done, too!"

The man addressed shifted the tobacco in his mouth and lazily raising his gun, pointed it at Miriam's back.

"Don't do that!" said Wilson.

"The gun's empty," said the other.

"What if it is? It's a mighty unsportsmanlike act!" The fellow wheeled about and turned the gun

straight on Wilson, who struck it up angrily with his hand; the gun went off with a loud report over their heads.

For a moment the hunters stood, deafened and ashamed.

"There, you fool! What did I tell you? Now Zoë Mason will go home and tell the General we fired a load of shot after her."

"If it makes the General put a stop to this nonsense the shot won't be wasted. Miss Zoë's been hankering after that girl ever since Christmas—she's always talking about her."

"It's a hoodoo, I tell you," said Danny Wilson, with increasing conviction.

"A hoodoo named Jim Trenholm," suggested another, cynically. "Miss Zoë wants to see what sort of a person it is that Jim's gone on."

"I tell you, it's a hoodoo," repeated Wilson, monotonously.

At the sound of the shot the two girls had turned back; Miriam was startled, but Zoë was angry. "Wait," she called, imperatively, "I'm going home with you now if I die for it! Besides, you've got to lend me a pair of shoes. I can't be seen on the main street looking like this."

"Oh, I am sorry!" sighed Miriam.

"Well, you needn't be. That's the last annoyance of the kind you'll ever have in Tallawara! I'll take this thing in hand myself! If there isn't any chivalry left in the men, the women will have to attend to it, and I'm going to tell those fellows what I think about them, the first chance I get!"

"Let it alone," said Miriam, despondently. "You will do more harm than good."

But Zoë, whose past experience had taught her to believe that to be obeyed she had but to speak, followed Miriam to the Mission, chattering away in tremendous spirits. "I'm mighty glad to get in here again," she said, as she went toward Miriam's room. "This hall fairly shines with piety—it makes me feel just as if I was going to church, all neat and clean and godly. Is this the way the Yankees—oh, I beg your pardon!" she stopped, confused.

"What is it?" said Miriam, who was holding open the door of her bedroom.

"Honest Injun, it just slipped out! I never meant to call you a Yankee to your face!" said Zoë, contritely.

"But what else am I?"

Zoë stepped inside and took a comprehensive survey before she answered. "Well, whatever you are, it's mighty plain that you're not a Tallawara girl; there's not one in town who hasn't a picture of Jim up in her room. He's a part of our education; sooner or later every one of us falls in love with him. We've got to have it; like the measles or the whooping-cough, or—or—just plain scarlet fever," drawled Zoë, as she looked up and noted that Miriam's clear, delicate skin was slowly flushing. "The scarlet-fever kinds," she added, "are the most serious on account of the after-effects; some it makes deaf, some it makes blind, and others it makes dumb; I'm a scarlet-fever case myself."

Miriam had turned away her head. "It has not

exactly made you dumb," she said, with a little laugh, as she opened a closet and stooped as if hunting for something on the floor.

"No, but it's made me blind to the good qualities of other men: men who are as much better than Jim Trenholm is, as day is than night."

"Is day better than night?" Miriam handed Zoë a pair of shoes as she spoke.—"I forgot to ask for your sprained ankle," she added, hastily.

"My sprained ankle is well," said Zoë, putting on her shoes, "and we won't talk any more about Jim Trenholm if you don't want to. Let's go and cook dinner. I just love coming round here to your house. It's got all the excitement of doing something wicked, without committing any sin!"

XXX

FOR REMEMBRANCE

MIRIAM was not quite able to resign herself to the routine of every-day after that dinner with Zoë Mason; she had come home from school and dressed with what seemed to Louisa unwarrantable festivity.

"What for you puttin' on dat fine gray gown when de ain't nobody gwine see it but me an' Louisiana?" she inquired, as she waited on Miriam at the supper-table.

"I put it on because I wanted to remember something."

"It'd been a heap mo' sensible if you'd tied a red string round yo' little finger," grumbled Louisa.

"I don't believe it would have been so becoming."

Louisa giggled. "What you all 'fraid o' forgettin', honey?" she murmured, insinuatingly.

"I *had* forgotten it," Miriam spoke dreamily.

"Fo'gotten what, hon'?"

"That I was not quite twenty-three years old."

"Took Miss Zoë to remine you o' dat, didn't it?" chuckled Louisa. "Miss Zoë's a pow'ful han' at remin'in' folks o' dere young days. She jus' makes some o' dese yeah ole beaux roun' Tallawara skip like rams, an' de little ones clap dere han's fo' joy!—Is you gwine to sit in yo' pa's study dis evenin', Miss

Miriam?" Louisa was standing behind Miriam, and the downward glance from the corners of her great brown eyes rested in laughing mischief on the young girl's hair.

"No. Light the lamps in the parlor."

Every shining tooth in Louisa's head grinned significantly as she hastened to obey.

The parlor at the Mission was a room of which Miss Simmons and Miss Edwards were wont to declare that it would be a lesson to the Tallawara people—if they could only see it! Everything matched; the paper was of a delicate drab, unmarked by speck or flaw; the paint was white, and of a beautiful dull finish; the furniture was covered with a pale drab material that precisely reproduced the color of the paper, and the gray Brussels carpet followed a decorous suit with figures worn to harmonious indistinctness by age. The books on the table were of the most elevated standard and the pictures on the walls were all Madonnas—rows of Raphaels, and Carlo Dolces, and Correggios—who all simpered sweetly down on Miriam as she entered with a paper-bound novel in her hand.

She had not been reading for more than fifteen or twenty minutes when the little bell which was set into the front door jangled loudly. She heard Louisa tramping heavily through the hall, and a voice inquired for Miss Simmons.

"She done gone away, suh," giggled Louisa. "De ain't nobody at home but Miss Mi'iam."

"Can I see Miss Long?"

"Course you could, suh! Miss Mi'iam's sittin' in de pahloh readin' her book.—Miss Mi'iam," throwing

wide open the door, "here's Mr. James Trenholm come a-callin'."

Miriam rose; her whole attitude was a question. "Is there anything I can do for you?" she said, while Louisa waited in an ecstasy of amusement.

"I came to ask Miss Simmons," said Trenholm, "if she could lend me,"—he hesitated—"oh—ah," he began, "her copy of *Young's Night Thoughts.*" Miriam saw his glance fall upon the book. "I only want to verify a quotation, and if you'll let me sit here by the lamp I can get what I need without carrying the book away."

"Louisa, go and bring Mr. Trenholm paper and pencil."

"No," said Trenholm, "I have paper and pencil in my pocket. You needn't wait, Louisa."

The woman turned reluctantly away, and Miriam caught, with dismay, the last gleam of her appreciative grin over all this unnecessary by-play. It would never do to allow Louisa to retain the belief that Trenholm had been expected, so Miriam remained standing, stiff and inhospitable, in front of her chair. "You will find the *Night Thoughts* on the table," she said.

"Thank you, I see it; and if you exact it, I will copy something, but I had much rather not. It would be a great waste of time;—may we be seated? —Don't look so angry!"

"I am sorry that Miss Simmons is not at home."

"I had the pleasure of seeing her off on the train, and also, a little later, of seeing you and Zoë Mason start from the General's gate."

"Miss Mason came all the way with me."

"So I have been told."

"Where did you hear of it?"

"One hears everything in Tallawara, and this afternoon I made my first journey to the drug-store since I have been ill; the usual committee was sitting!—By the way," he added, "wouldn't you like to know how I am?"

"To all appearances you are very well."

Trenholm looked significantly at a chair. "On the contrary, I am far from strong; even the short walk over here was an exertion."

Miriam laughed and sat down.

"There were people," said Trenholm, following her example, "who wrote me a line of condolence, who expressed an interest and some regret."

"There are a great many kinds of people in the world."

"Yes; there is an old rhyme to that effect, 'Many fishes in the sea——'"

Miriam looked downward, idly fingering the leaves of her book.

"And so, you did not care?"

"Everybody cared," she said.

"Everybody but you?"

Miriam was so unaccustomed to this school of fencing that she did not even recognize the preliminary courtesies. And, not for the first time, Trenholm found himself feeling in her presence an unprecedented embarrassment and self-distrust. Zoë knew the game; but Miriam made the game seem not worth playing. He remembered with momentary hot shame that within the week he had almost asked Zoë

Mason to be his wife; thinking that with Helen Thurston for a friend, he might find the elements, though scattered, of a happy married life in Tallawara. "I wanted to see you alone," he began, almost haltingly; "your father and the two ladies are coming home to-morrow; this was my last chance."

"My father told you when we met you at Ocean Bay that he would be happy to welcome you at any time, Mr. Trenholm!" Miriam was like the Princess in a story; the True Prince must conquer, or at least defy, the Dragon of scorn and obloquy who guarded the portals of her palace.

"I should have done nothing but harm to both you and your father if I had accepted his invitation. I have seen too well to-day the evil effects of inconsiderate championship."

"What harm has been done?" asked Miriam, quickly.

"The town is ringing with Zoë Mason's visit here; she stayed two or three hours, didn't she?"

"An hour and a half."

"And she was here yesterday. Why do you allow her to do it?"

"I think that you know Miss Mason well enough to be aware that she does things whether she is allowed or not. I did all I could to persuade her to turn back. I didn't even stop at running away from her." Miriam spoke coldly; his manner had hurt.

"Yes, that was another of the counts against you. I heard, at the drug-store, of course, that you treated her with such rudeness that Bart Henderson fired a charge of shot after you. It was outrageous!"

"Which was outrageous?"

"Henderson, of course! How can you ask?"

"It was difficult to judge, by your tone."

Trenholm rose and walked across the room. "I do not know what to do," he said. "This has turned a great deal of undesirable comment upon you and upon the Mission."

"Is that my fault?"

Trenholm came and stood in front of her. "Your fault?" he cried, with something like a groan. "Your fault—because that coward fired on you?"

"He had no idea of firing on me!" said Miriam, contemptuously. "He wanted to attract Miss Mason's attention and so made a noise."

"Zoë should have had more consideration——"

"And how about yourself?" said Miriam. "If I can't receive a girl of my own age, without causing disagreeable comment, don't you think that to come here when none of my family are at home is, to say the least, thoughtless on your part?"

"I had no choice but to come! I have wanted to see you ever since I have been ill, I have thought of you constantly, and have not been able to get a word of you;——"

At that moment Louisa came to the door. "I reckon, Miss Mi'iam," she said, "it's about time fo' me to g'won along home. I done locked up de lower part ob de house, an' Louisiana, she's got a pallet in de dressin'-room right 'longside o' you' room. De ain't nothin' lef' to lock but de front do' an de do' ob de back gall'ry—I'm gwine do dat now."

"Tell her to go somewhere and wait until you want

her. She knows that she oughtn't to leave you alone to-night with no one but Louisiana in the house!" said Trenholm, in a low voice, as Louisa tramped down the hall. "Call to her! Quick, Miriam,—dear, be generous!"

"She is coming back immediately, and you must go," Miriam's voice softened.

"You shall not turn me away!"

"But I must—for the present."

"There she is again! Send her off; I have something that I want to say to you."

Miriam half smiled. "It can wait a little longer. —You may open the door for Mr. Trenholm, Louisa, he is just going."

Trenholm left the room. Miriam heard Louisa close the hall-door behind him and softly turn the key. "Dah now!" she exclaimed, coming back to the parlor, "I ain't made a soun'! Dey ain't nothin' huhts dere feelin's like a bang!—My Lawd, Mis' Mi'iam! you' eyes shine big like an angel Star ob Bethlehem!"

"Good-night, Louisa!" said Miriam; "take the key of the kitchen with you."

Louisa peered at her curiously and went away. "'Tain't no way to act!" she muttered as she let herself out. "Ef Mis' Mi'iam done dressed herse'f up to de nines dat-a-way fo' Mars' Jim, how-cum she to tuhn him out? An' ef she done didn't dress herse'f fo' him, how-cum he to come? White folks ain't got no Why!"

Louisiana's placid snores were coming through the closed door of the dressing-room when Miriam, after turning out the lamps in the parlor and hall, felt

her way across her bedroom and lighting the candles on the bureau looked at herself in the mirror. Could she have looked like that to Trenholm? If she had he knew that she understood; he would not be angry. "An angel Star of Bethlehem!" A little fluttering laugh passed her lips; she stooped and blew out the light,—an onlooker would have marvelled that the radiance ceased. She sat down on the lounge, her hands clasped together in her lap; and for a long time she did not move. Then she rose and put up the window that at one end of her room looked out upon the fields back of the Mission. The night was dark, the blue of the sky was very deep, and, although there was no wind stirring, a soft breath, as of newly turned earth, came toward her.

The window at which she was standing faced the open country, and, except for a couple of cabins in a distant field, this was the last house on the outskirts of the town; still Miriam felt safe in spite of the loneliness.

All at once she heard below her the sound of heavy feet and something dragging; the steps passed around the corner of the house.

"There are several men," she whispered to herself. "What can it be?" Feeling carefully she crossed to a window on the other side of the room that opened upon a small porch, called the gallery. The dragging on the ground ceased, but she could hear a low murmur of voices. Then out of the silence came a series of long, frightful groans, rising in hoarse cries and shrieks, as of some creature in mortal agony. Miriam thought perhaps Louisa had met with an accident;

without hesitation she ran from her room into the side hall that led to the gallery, and as she opened the door she was greeted by a crash of sound. The shrieking, groaning noises, now less human, were reinforced by the loud braying of horns and an indescribably terrifying clatter of tin cans and rattling bones. She knew at once what it meant, and stepping behind a close lattice that had been nailed to the porch to support some vines she tried to see out into the darkness.

Suddenly she became aware that a man stood beside her, so near that in spite of the noise she could hear his breath coming quick and sharp as if he had been running. "Who is it?" he whispered.

Miriam tried to withdraw toward the house.

"I am Brinton," he said; "I have come to stop this thing. I couldn't get here before. If you are Miss Long, go into the house."

"What do they want?"

"I beg you to go in; at any minute one of these boys may light a torch; you will be seen!"

"Is it what is called a charivari?"

"Never mind, only go!" implored Brinton.

"If they mean to insult my father, he is not at home. I am alone."

"They know that you are alone. If you must have it—they mean it for you! Now will you go in the house? Good God, what are you doing?"

He shrank back into the shadow, for Miriam was drawing a match in a slow, sure stroke along the rough railing of the gallery. It crackled and flared with a bright blaze, as she held it down and forward, a little

in front of her, that it might cast its light upon those below.

The noises stopped instantly. Miriam neither moved nor spoke, and the light, burning steadily in the still night, shone fully upon her face. Fascinated, the rough crowd watched the long delicate hand as the tiny flame crept toward it; with a dexterous, almost imperceptible motion Miriam extinguished the burning match; but the young fellows below knew that she was standing there yet: beautiful, defenceless, contemptuous, her steady gaze seeming to penetrate even the darkness.

Danny Wilson's voice broke the silence. "I can't go this," he said, and they fled away, leaving the resined fence-rail and packing-box behind them.

"Miss Long, I am ashamed of my countrymen," began Brinton, "I am ashamed of being a Southerner."

"It was only the hoodlum element," said Miriam, tranquilly. "One finds it in the North as well as in the South. Good-night, Mr. Brinton."

XXXI

BITTER IN SOUL

THE two ladies and Mr. Long came home the next morning. As they drove up to the house Miriam saw that they already knew what had happened. She had spent the night wide-eyed and wakeful, feeling herself despised, insulted, set apart; and after the shortest and briefest of greetings she hurried off to school with Miss Simmons, anxious to escape the unendurable commiseration of their eyes.

Back at the house Mr. Long was walking up and down, up and down the long hall. For himself, a charivari more or less made very little difference. This form of approval had been accorded him by his fellow-citizens so often in the past that he had become hardened; but he was not hardened for his child; the thought of her crimsoned forehead, of her humiliated eyes was agony.

"I shall give it up," he said; "I shall give it up. It has been the work of years, and I expected to die in it and for it; but I cannot sacrifice the child to these brutes. It is but right that she should have her life; I have lived mine, and so long as I cannot protect her from insult, it has been a failure; I shall give up!"

And Miss Edwards, her unpacking forgotten, sat upright in one of the stiff hall chairs, her hands clasped tight in her lap, and her heart boiling with ineffectual

rage. "Oh, to be able to do something! No matter what, if it were only something!" At last Mr. Long was called away, and she went upstairs to her room. Louisa was there, standing by the lower drawer of a great press in which the Mission linen was kept.

"Look at dis, Miss Edwards," she said, "de rats done got in and eaten up two ob de best table-cloths." It was noticeable that the negroes never addressed Miss Edwards and Miss Simmons by their first names as they did their old-time mistresses and their families.

"Go and bring some rat-poison," said Miss Edwards.

"Ain't a speck in de house."

Miss Edwards had not taken off her wraps, and, after her long, wearisome journey, she was nervous and shaken; but she felt a restless desire for motion. "I am going down street to get some," she said, and stalked out of the house.

"My lan! Dat woman mus' 'a' swallered one o' dese yere steam-engines," said Louisa in unemulative admiration of her energy.

Miss Edwards walked through the village streets, glaring ferociously, seeing in every man she met a possible participator in the outrage of the night before. She turned into the drug-store, her fierce mood in no wise abated by hearing a little titter from the assembled crowd. "I want some rat-poison," she said.

Danny Wilson, who was clerk, pretending to be driven by unwonted trepidation, dived down behind the counter and produced a small box.

Miss Edwards took it. "Is this strong?" she said; "I want a strong poison."

"Yas, miss," drawled the young man. "That's strong enough to kill a yaller dog."

Fatal speech!

"Thank you!" answered Miss Edwards. "That is precisely what I want it for! Give me two boxes. A pack of miserable curs gave us great annoyance at the Mission last night, and I should like to be ready for them in case they come again!" Then she went away, leaving wrath in the hearts of the members of the drug-store club and maledictions in the mouth of Danny Wilson.

General Mason, who heard the whole thing, went home gleeful and reported it to his wife. His daughter had been sent to Prestonpans by the early morning train.

"I just wish Zoë Mason was here to see what she's done! This comes of her taking up people she hasn't any business to!"

"Danny Wilson said Miss Long scared them off by lighting a match at them; she just stood up there like an avenging angel, and for the life of him he couldn't go on with it."

"It's very lucky for Miss Long," said Mrs. Mason, severely, "that the young fellows who went in for that shivarree were all of them perfect gentlemen. There was not one of them that didn't belong to the first families of Tallawara!"

A time of unquiet recrimination, restlessness, and foreboding followed. The weather was inclement, to an unparalleled degree; chilly rains and high winds had been succeeded by cold, and even frost and snow,

and the pent-up Africans, in their leaking cabins, had time to sit over their smoking fires and feel the screw of physical misery giving the last turn to discontent and revolt. Trifling but ugly quarrels began to take place between them and the townspeople, and an occasional drunken negro,—enough under the influence of liquor to escape the ordinary influence of fear,—would dare provoke a personal encounter. The college question added to all this an unexpected acrimony in that the students, through Yarnell's clever tactics, were all in favor of the change; and the negroes, secretly taught by Guthrie Johnson, were, to a man, violently opposed to removal. That the issue did not seem one which greatly concerned the black population of Tallawara made their interference only the more irritating to their opponents; but the black vote, if used to reinforce that of the followers of such men as the President, General Mason, Thurston, Trenholm, and others who wished to keep the college in the town, would stand a chance of sending its candidate to the Legislature. The question was how to effect the combination?

Johnson's activity had been unceasing; his days were passed in journeyings about the country, blustering, arguing, coaxing, and cajoling the colored people, and delivering wily harangues to the whites. He made long visits to the capital, and gave it to be understood that the Governor rested peacefully under his thumb; but in spite of this, the sudden death of the representative, Wilson, gave him intense anxiety; for the last month he had been steadily losing ground, strange rumors were afloat in regard to Hannibal and

Ailsa, and a suspicion was prevalent that in some way he was concerned in the attack on Trenholm. He was beginning to be aware that his townspeople regarded him with more than usual opposition and dislike when one morning about two weeks after Miss Edwards's purchase of the rat-poison he met the President and Thurston on the street corner. Here were two people at least whose need of him was so great that they would not dare to treat him cavalierly; he stepped up to them and shook hands with effusion.

"Look here, Gus," said the President, abruptly, "what is this I hear about a movement to get the postmaster's place for Codman?"

Johnson looked embarrassed; he had hoped that he had been able to manage that piece of diplomacy unobserved.

"I heard that it was distinctly on your recommendation," continued the President.

"That carries its absurdity on the face of it," said Johnson, eagerly, "for I have no influence in Washington, and even if I had you might be sure I shouldn't work it to have a nigger appointed to office."

"Then he has been appointed!" cried the old gentleman, wrathfully. "By Heaven! I'll send my letters to be mailed in Prestonpans, and so will every gentleman in the place!"

"Codman is a respectable man," said Thurston.

"He may be—a very decent nigger," admitted the President, "but I am not going to have him handing me out my letters day after day. You might have known that we wouldn't swallow that, Johnson!"

"When Sam Codman was your own body-servant,

sir, you didn't mind his handing you your johnny-cakes day after day, and swallowing them, too, for that matter," said Johnson.

"That is an impertinent subterfuge, Mr. Johnson," said the President, coldly. "And it is absolutely unjust and outrageous that a man who will be personally obnoxious to the majority of the people of the place should be given an office of that kind."

"As for the majority," said Johnson, "I think the majority will be extremely well pleased."

"You have no business to consider the colored majority as a majority at all!" said the President, hotly. "We can't and we won't be governed by it any more than we would be governed by a lot of children in their cradles."

"I fear that the colored majority is the only one that will retain the college in Tallawara," said Johnson, quietly.

"Then let it go! I have warned you more than once, Guthrie Johnson, that if my private plans can be worked out only through the disgrace of my native town, my plans must go to the wall!"

"I am afraid you don't quite understand the situation, Mr. President. Are you aware that Judge Wilson died this morning?"

The President's face clouded. "I am sorry for that. Not on poor Wilson's account, he has suffered long enough, but there is no knowing now how soon this whole question may be sprung upon us, and I fear we are unprepared."

"The Governor may appoint the special election any day," said Johnson, impressively, "and do you

know, sir, that the Legislature is evenly divided on the college matter? The whole thing depends on the man who is returned at this special. Now, who is that man going to be?"

"Not you," said the President. "In the fall I did think you had a chance,—a fighting chance; but since that mysterious attack on Jim Trenholm, and this report in regard to your advocacy of Codman, the whole town's set against you."

"If I am unhindered in my policy, and if I may count upon the support of the college people," said Johnson, "I think we may weather the storm."

"What are we to support you in?"

"Mr. President," Johnson began, oratorically, "we are working for a cause, a righteous cause: the cause of education, and the cause of religion. The future of our young men depends on our success, and with it the future of our State; this is no time for political distinctions."

The President faced Johnson straight as an arrow, his cane up like the sword of an officer on parade. All the old Confederate soldier was on fire within him, and Thurston ranged himself sympathetically at the old gentleman's side.

"It is not even a time for race distinctions," Johnson went on. "We must win on the general principles of right and wrong. Whatever party will bring in the right, that party must be ours for the time being——"

"Johnson!" The President's voice was like the crack of a whip. "If you are aiming at having me acquiesce in Codman's appointment in order to con-

ciliate a lot of damned, good-for-nothing niggers, you are aiming mighty wide of your mark. I protest against Codman's occupying that office, and I mean to do it openly, too."

"These are not your opinions, too?" asked Johnson, turning to Thurston.

"I agree with the President," said Thurston. "Theoretically, I may believe that justice demands the rule of the majority; practically, I know that in such a state of things as exists here the rule of the majority would be nothing but the rankest injustice."

Johnson lifted his hat and bowed to the two men formally. "Good-morning, gentlemen," he said, "I think that undoubtedly you will live to regret this."

XXXII

THE DAYS OF AN HIRELING

ONE evening about a week later Thurston came home worried and excited. "There is talk of Yarnell's running for nomination," he said to Helen. "I am afraid that there is nothing left for us now but to prepare for the worst."

"And you will sit by and see the removal of the college without an effort to prevent it?"

Thurston looked up at her quickly,—there was an unaccustomed sting in her speech. "If by that effort we are going to reduce the town to a state of anarchy and mob-rule, it would be better to leave it unmade. Besides," he spoke a little wearily, "except on account of the President, the question has very little interest for us. I think that, however the college goes, Yarnell will remain supreme, and his influence, eventually, will be worked against me."

"It wouldn't be a bad thing if you were forced to leave."

"I am no longer a young man, I should find it difficult to get work, and without my salary we haven't enough to live upon."

"You are a young man! You mustn't allow yourself to feel that way. Only let it be known that you wish to change and any number of positions—" but all at once she stopped, afraid lest he should divine

the sudden vivid recollection that assailed her: "*Thurston will never come up.*" She could see her father as he said it with a positive nod of his snow-white curls and that look of cherubic obstinacy, the memory of which had power to irritate her even now. "*He shall come up,*" she had said to herself.

"They give those positions to younger men," said Thurston, despondently. "Men who have written things, who have made a name. I have never wished to write things, and I have never cared for a name; perhaps I haven't had enough energy, or it may be that I have allowed this life down here to carry me too far. I have drifted so long with it that I have lost my grip of the oars and given up all interest in the race." He turned to the mantel-shelf to get his pipe, and as he was filling it his eyes fell on the desk where Helen was sitting. "What are you doing?" he asked, looking wonderingly down at a pile of dingy-looking papers before her. "One would say you were correcting compositions."

"Yes, I am doing them for Miriam Long. She is worn out with that wretched school."

A troubled look came over Thurston's face, but he did not remonstrate; it was surely not his duty to interfere with a little help, given quietly to a tired young teacher. "What a pity," he said at last, between puffs of smoke, "to throw away a young life like that in such a fruitless struggle."

"If the people here would only help, the struggle would not be fruitless!"

"The people can't help."

"And why not?"

"Because Mr. Long and the others have not gone about it in the right way. They have made mistakes from the beginning, and I fear they are making a most serious one now. Have you heard anything of the negroes having political meetings in the schoolhouse?"

"There is one to-night."

"We shall have trouble."

"Why haven't they as much right to hold political meetings as the white people? The next thing you will deny is that they have a right to vote."

"They have a legal right, but it undoubtedly has been a great moral wrong." He stooped and knocked the ashes from his pipe against the side of the fireplace, and began filling it again.

"I don't think I can have possibly understood you!" said Helen, who had grown quite pale and had turned her back upon her papers. "Do you mean that you would deny the right to vote to a thoroughly good, honest, useful, upright man like this Codman who has been appointed postmaster?"

"Codman is an exception, one out of a horde, an illiterate, brutal, irresponsible horde! I suppose you know he has made up his mind to take the post-office, and that the whole white community is determined to prevent it."

"What can they do to prevent it?"

"They could do a great many things: burn the post-office and shoot the postmaster, for example."

"They wouldn't dare!"

"If Codman were not such a good fellow, at the bottom, they would have dared more than once to-

day; but there is hardly a man in the town who doesn't know that the business will be much more carefully and conscientiously attended to than it has been, and it speaks well for them that this knowledge has its influence,—at least, it has had its influence thus far: they are willing to make the attempt to get Codman out peacefully, instead of either ejecting him by violence or never permitting him to enter upon his duties at all."

"What does the President say?"

"Oh, he intends to send all his letters over to Prestonpans to be mailed," said Thurston, with a little smile, "and those that come, in the meantime, he is going to refuse to receive."

"He'll never keep it up!"

"They none of them keep anything up very long; one gets accustomed to that in time."

Helen did not trust herself to speak, and Thurston continued to smoke, tranquilly looking at the fire, as if unaware of the disgrace of his heterodoxy; at last, he declared himself too tired to sit up any longer, and left Helen at her work. About an hour later Helen put out her light and was about to go up-stairs when she heard a little scratching at the study window, which opened on a back porch. It had become so warm that the blind had not been drawn, and anyone turning the slats of the shutter could look directly into the room through the thin white curtain. Helen stepped to the window. "Who is there?" she said, in loud but rather quavering tones.

"Fo' God's sake, Miss Helen, you keep still!" said a negro's voice outside.

"Who is it?" said Helen, in lower tones.

"It's me—Ailsa."

"Ailsa! Why couldn't you come to the door?"

"Because I don't want to be seen, Mis' Helen. Lemme get in de windeh."

Helen opened the shutter and Ailsa climbed across the sill, then closed the window and drew the blind. "You all can make a light now," she said, "an' gimme sumpin to eat, please, ma'am,—I'se starvin'."

Helen lighted a candle and led the way to the kitchen, where Ailsa, gaunt, thin, and in rags, ate ravenously of the food set before her.

"Why all this secrecy, Ailsa? Is there any reason that you shouldn't come back openly?" asked Helen, after Ailsa had somewhat satisfied her hunger.

Ailsa leaned over and whispered, "Don' you know, Mis' Helen, dat Hannibal's de man dat killed Mars' Jim?"

"Mr. Trenholm is not dead!"

Ailsa sat up in her chair as if electrified. "Not daid!" she cried in a loud, angry voice; "not daid? What's de meanin' of dish yere paper dat Gus Johnson send me, den?" She drew from her pocket a piece of old newspaper, in which Trenholm's death had been announced.

"That was a mistake; it was corrected the next day."

Ailsa's eyes began to flash dangerously.

"Why, Ailsa," said Helen, pityingly, "do you mean to say that you and Hannibal have believed that he was dead all this time?"

For a moment Ailsa was too enraged to speak; at

last, in a choked voice, she began: "He's kep' us dere, week in an' week out in feah of our lives, an' all de time he knowed dere was no cause fo' it. Dey watched us like we was pris'ners; an' every time Hannibal's tried to get away, dey tu'ned him back."

"But how is that possible? Hannibal is free to go where he wishes."

"He ain't free," said Ailsa; "he hired to Gus Johnson fo' six months and got paid one ahead. Some of de res' of it was promised us when we got down to de plantation; but I had a row with de manager an' we couldn't get it nohow. We stood it 'bout fo' weeks, an' den Hannibal an' me couldn't stand it no longeh, so we made up our minds to leave out. But when we started to cla' ourselves at de sto', we found such a big long bill 'gainst Hannibal dat we couldn't have worked it off together in a yeah."

"What induced you to be so extravagant?"

"Extravagant!" shouted Ailsa. "I didn't buy all dat trash! Dey made it up on us!"

"But in one month! I should think you could tell what you had bought and what you hadn't bought."

"We did tell; but who gwine beliebe us? An' dat manager tole us 'twasn't safe fo' us to come back here nohow."

"Where is Hannibal?" said Helen, suddenly remembering that he might be waiting outside hungry.

"Hannibal! He ain't heah!" said Ailsa. "He too 'fraid ob Gus Johnson."

"But it is a shame! I am going to speak to Mr. Trenholm; something must be done."

"You'd betteh speak mighty quick, den," said

Ailsa, "fo' if dat somepin ain't done befo' long, dere won't be any Hannibal lef' to do fo'."

It was getting so late that Helen finally sent Ailsa to the servant's cabins; but the next morning when she went into the kitchen, she was greatly surprised to find, on questioning the cook, that Ailsa had not been seen.

"You all mus' 'a' dreamed dat, Mis' Helen; Ailsa ain't been yere since Christmas. Mus' 'a' been someone dat looked like her," adding, with a touch of jealousy; "Ailsa's a common-lookin' niggeh—lots of niggehs round heah look like Ailsa!"

Helen felt that it was wiser not to insist, but a little later in the day went down to the Masons' to see if Ailsa might have taken refuge there. As she came in at the gate, she saw Mrs. Mason and Brinton standing on the steps of the porch talking together.

"I'm mighty sorry I can't lend them to your sister, Mr. Brinton," Mrs. Mason was saying as Helen came up. "Good-mornin', Mis' Thurston, we're talking about some diamond buckles that Mr. Brinton wanted to borrow for a play his sister's going to act in," she explained, courteously, "but when William James Mason tied up that white satin dress to send down to Zoë in Prestonpans week before last it struck him that it would be an excellent joke to tuck those diamond shoe-buckles into the bundle, and as no consideration of anyone else's feelings is ever allowed to come between William James and a joke, he'd no sooner thought of it than he did it."

"But what is the joke?" asked Helen.

"The joke on Zoë Mason is that she has always

declared that she'd never get married without her grandfather's diamond shoe-buckles; but the joke, now, on William James Mason is that Zoë wrote right back to him that she'd take the hint he gave her and marry the first man that asked her."

Brinton turned and walked away; when he was once safely screened by the shrubbery he crossed the flower-beds and sat down for a moment on a wheelbarrow that had been left under a tree. "I'm shaking like I'd seen a ghost in broad daylight," he said, with an uneasy laugh; "what in the name of sense did the General send those buckles off for? It can't be he favors Val Sterling!—By God, I've got to go down to Prestonpans and see!"

Helen, in the meantime, had explained her quandary to Mrs. Mason. "No, Ailsa didn't come here," Mrs. Mason said; "I reckon she's gone back to get Hannibal."

"Why didn't she tell someone and ask for help?"

"For one thing, she's afraid of Gus Johnson, and for another, I suppose she thought that, even if she did ask for help, she wouldn't get it. People are mighty careful how they interfere with another man's niggers down here."

"But they are not another man's negroes! They are nobody's negroes. That man has no right to detain them on his plantation."

"Oh, yes he has; if Hannibal's bound himself he's got to work his time out, and if you try to get him off, I reckon you'll have trouble."

"Do you suppose that Ailsa is walking all the way back there?"

"Oh, she'll get a lift now and then from somebody!" said Mrs. Mason, easily. "And if you'll take my advice, Mrs. Thurston, the less you say of it the better it will be for Ailsa; if Gus Johnson should find out about her being here last night he might follow her up."

"You don't mean to say that you think he would harm her?"

"All I can say is, that if I was Ailsa I'd a heap rather he didn't find out where I was! But what's the good of worrying over them, Mrs. Thurston! You must trust those niggers to look out for themselves—they'll never freeze while there are fence-rails in the country nor starve so long as other people's chicken-coops are handy.—Come on out here and see my jonquils; I reckon that where you came from you didn't often see flowers in bloom out of doors on the fourth day of February."

Helen came away from Mrs. Mason's in an unsatisfied mood, in spite of the large bunch of yellow flowers she carried with her, and, seeing Trenholm in the distance, she hurried to meet him. "Something must be done," she said, when she had told him the story she had heard from Ailsa the night before. "Hannibal doesn't belong to this Johnson, and yet everyone behaves as if Johnson had as much right to him as if he had bought him."

"He has bought him."

"Before the war Hannibal would have been worth at least two thousand dollars; Johnson has paid one month's wages;—you have the advantage of getting your chattels cheaper nowadays!"

"Don't sneer," said Trenholm, amiably.

"As far as I can see, you are a slave-holding population as much as you ever were! Ailsa told me last night that they whipped them down on that Crown County plantation."

"The only way to reach a darkey's moral sense is through his skin, and it is a good deal better to whip him out in the clean air than to send him to the county jail; besides, are we the only slave-holding population in this country? Did you never hear of an employee getting into arrears at the company store? The slavery of debt is pretty universal."

"But this is an unjust debt! Ailsa is reduced to a shadow from starvation, and yet she says that a bill has been run up against them for provisions enough for a family of ten. These poor people are children,—they are cheated, they are abused!"

"And is it our fault that these poor children are taken out of our care and handed over to the tender mercies of men like Gus Johnson and his manager? Who forced this very situation upon us after the war? Who threw us into this antagonism with the blacks? The North, Mrs. Thurston, with its sacred Fifteenth Amendment! And now the North stands by and blames us throughout the length and breadth of the land for its own work!"

"Oh!" cried Helen, impatiently. "Are you going to let Hannibal and Ailsa die because of the rancor you feel about a Fifteenth Amendment to which you none of you pay any more heed than you do to—to——"

"The Ten Commandments," suggested Trenholm,

obligingly. "But they are not going to die, Mrs. Thurston."

"They are cold,—Ailsa said that their cabin was open to the four winds of Heaven."

Trenholm glanced significantly at Helen's bunch of flowers, and laughed. "I think that if the climate allows those to live out of doors, two big stout negroes like Hannibal and Ailsa——"

"I never needed a fire so much as I have needed it in the last two weeks!" cried Helen.

"If Ailsa wants wood," said Trenholm, "she'll send Hannibal out to take an armful from the first wood-pile he comes across, and if there's no wood-pile, there are nearly always fence-rails or—chair-boards! Look at this house we are passing; it belongs to me, and I carelessly let it lie untenanted for two years; the result is that it is completely gutted. There's not a door nor a wainscot in it, and even the floors have been ripped up by the negroes for kindling. I assure you, Mrs. Thurston, that a little of the superfluous sympathy you are wasting on the blacks might well be turned into some other channel." Trenholm's face assumed the expression of careless cruelty and arrogance that seemed to fall upon it whenever the question of the negroes was broached; it made Helen wince.

"Good-by," she said, turning in at her own gate. "If you stay any longer we shall quarrel; so I do not ask you to come in."

XXXIII

REASON

AS soon as Trenholm was out of sight Helen started toward the Mission school with the essays she had corrected the night before. As she came to the gate she found a crowd of children standing, frightened, about the doorway.

"What is the matter?" she asked.

"Oh, Lawd, Mis' Thu'ston, it's Miss Mi'iam,—she done daid!"

"She ain't daid, nigger, she's faintin'—I reckon she gwine die soon, dough," added the speaker, hopefully.

"I tell you, she daid, daid as a do'-nail!" insisted the first. "You g'won in an' you'll see."

Helen pushed through the crowd and entered the school-house. Miriam was lying on the platform, her head, drenched with water, in Miss Simmons's lap.

"I shall be all right in a few minutes," she gasped.

"You must go home," said Miss Edwards. "My dear, you must go home and lie down."

"Oh, no!" she attempted to rise; but fell back immediately, clouds of blackness billowing before her eyes.

"You can't teach to-day," said Helen.

Poor Miriam did not answer; she was already slipping back again into unconsciousness.

The three women half-carried her to the door, and, once outside, the clear air seemed to revive her, but she was still too weak to attempt the short walk homeward.

"I will go for help," said Helen, and as she turned away she saw that a man in the road had driven his buggy up to the gate and was looking curiously toward the little group on the school-house steps. It was Yarnell. The children had stopped him with the appalling news of the death of their mistress, but he would scarcely have waited had not Helen been one of the women at the door.

"Can I be of any assistance, Mrs. Thurston?" he asked.

Helen, looking up, caught a malicious sparkle in his eye. "Oh, Mr. Yarnell, this is like your kindness!" she said, with an impish desire for retaliation. "Miss Long has fainted. I know that you will be glad to take her home. She turned and beckoned to Miss Edwards and Miss Simmons to bring Miriam to the carriage.

Yarnell jumped down and offered his arm to help the fainting girl in.

"I must stay; I can't go," she kept murmuring, "there is no one to take my place."

"I will take your place," said Helen, cheerfully; "it will be an amusement, and Miss Simmons and Miss Edwards will show me how."

The assurance was made in such a matter-of-fact tone that Miss Simmons and Miss Edwards, held dumb with amazement, made no remonstrance, while Miriam was too faint to feel anything more than a

sense of relief as Yarnell drove her away, carefully and gently walking his horse; for, much as he disapproved of her, and antagonistic as he felt, the Southerner was too strong in him to allow him to be rude to so beautiful a stranger.

He left her with her father and returned hastily to the school. It was a most unexpected piece of courtesy; Miss Edwards came forward anxiously as he appeared in the door. "The fresh air has seemed to do her good," he said; but his eyes roamed restlessly about, until they fell, with a gleam of triumph, on Helen sitting in front of a class of small black urchins, into whose woolly heads she was trying to drum the multiplication table.

Yarnell was immensely pleased. His face had been set toward the country when he had first passed the school-house, but it was of moment that this news should spread, and spread quickly, so he returned to the village, and before long was driving about the streets, shaking his head, more in sorrow than in anger, at the shameful tale he had to tell. And now, he told his friends, he was ready to give way. Like Cincinnatus he would forsake the peace and security of his humble life and leave the educational plough to rust in the furrow, in order to answer the call of his suffering and distracted country. He dared not leave his party to the dangers and uncertainties of an independent ticket. A strong candidate was needed, who should be able to carry all before him; and, although with great reluctance, he was at last willing to consent to allow himself to be nominated for the vacant seat in the State Legislature. If Mrs. Thurston had

not made up her mind to go into the Mission, with the probable sanction of her husband, he should not have felt called upon to undertake these responsibilities; but it was a time for every man to speak his mind clearly. They had allowed themselves the pleasure of weakness and kindly vacillation long enough; unless they wished to see again in the midst of their fair village the horrors and abuses of the period of Reconstruction, the white population of Tallawara must unite solidly against the ignominy and odium of negro supremacy.

Then, having set the whole town in such a state of turmoil that the interest in the advent of Codman at the post-office was almost forced to a secondary place, Yarnell started again for the country, where his skilfully told story created an even greater excitement.

When Helen told Thurston what she had done, there was no uneasiness in his face, no show of worry; he looked profoundly thoughtful, but went to his college duties in the afternoon without saying anything. In the evening, after he had finished his supper, however, he returned to the subject. "How long do you think that you will have to continue teaching out there?" he asked.

"It may be two or three days," said Helen; "it may be a week or more. Certainly until Miriam is sufficiently rested to teach again. And even then," she added, after a moment's thought, "I am not sure but that it is my duty to keep on. It would be a good thing if the townspeople were more interested in that Mission, and someone of position and influence is needed to start the ball."

"How long do you think that you will continue to be a person of position and influence if you persist in the undertaking?"

"Do you wish me to give it up?"

"I am not going to interfere."

"Those people out there at the Mission are martyrs!" she said.

Thurston came forward and laid his hand awkwardly on her head. "Do you care enough for their cause to make it worth while to share their martyrdom?" he said.

"I am tired of sitting by and seeing everyone's hand against them!"

Thurston's pressure upon her head increased, it even hurt her a little. "Do you *care?*" he persisted.

"I have no right to drag you into it," said Helen, hastily, and at that moment the little door-bell which hung in the outer hall suddenly rang with a vehemence that sent a nervous thrill through every board and beam in the house.

It was the President. The news of Helen's teaching in the Mission had reached him as he was returning, in a state of extreme exasperation, from a journey to Prestonpans in order to mail his letters. He almost breathed fire and flame as he whipped his horse through the village, and when he entered the Thurstons' study he was very red in the face. "Thurston," he said, not seeing Helen; "Thurston, what is this news I hear about your wife?"

Helen had been sitting near the window of the porch, outside of which stood a little table where she had placed a fresh pile of Mission essays. Before she

corrected each one she had taken it with the tongs and fumigated it a little over the low fire in the grate. She had been doing this when her talk with Thurston began, and she had picked up another at the moment the door-bell rang. In her astonishment at the President's words she loosened the tongs and dropped the paper into the flames. "You've made me burn Abraham Lincoln's essay," she said to the President; "now I shall have to give him 'perfect.' He has been saved, as by fire."

"What do you mean, Mrs. Thurston?" said the President. "It can't be true that you contemplate sacrificing the happiness of your whole life in Tallawara, jeopardizing your husband's future, perhaps his very life, for a mere whim?"

Helen put down the tongs and looked at the old gentleman a little sadly. He was one of the friends upon whom she had counted. "Is it so bad as that?" she said.

"Bad, madam? It's suicidal! The harm you have done already is incalculable. You have lost us all chance of retaining the college in Tallawara as neatly as if you had meant to do it. You've heard," he added, turning to Thurston, "that Yarnell's going to run for the Legislature? And he gives out that this move of Mrs. Thurston's is what has decided him."

"He has wanted to do it from the first," said Helen. "I can't see why he has been so long declaring himself."

"He's been holding off because he wasn't sure he could carry the town; you've made that possible for him, Mrs. Thurston; Tallawara is solid now."

"Solid?" murmured Helen.

"Yes, ma'am; divided on the color-line. The blacks have been growing more and more turbulent ever since Trenholm was hurt——"

"Because the white people have been growing more and more aggressive!"

"The white people have been merely taking the commonest precautions for self-protection!"

"The serenade to Miss Long, for example!"

"Oh, well, that was only a little boyish frolic," said the President, indulgently. "And yet—it shows the way the wind blows; it's the reason I'm here, in fact; matters are somewhat strained in Tallawara just now, Mrs. Thurston, and I came up to warn you as a friend that if you persist in your present course you'll antagonize every man, woman, and child in the place! Haven't you been here long enough to see how those people at the Mission are treated?—Ah, Trenholm, you're just in time to add your voice to mine!" he exclaimed, as Trenholm appeared in the doorway.

"I apologize, Mrs. Thurston," said Trenholm, "but I found the door-bell broken, and I knew the President must have been here."

"Trenholm," said the President, "I've always regretted that you didn't stay in college with us long enough for me to have the pleasure of expelling you! But I'll forgive you all the sins you——"

"Didn't commit," supplied Trenholm.

"If you'll only persuade Mrs. Thurston to abandon this mad project; the thing would be unwise at any time, but just now it's dangerous."

"The President is right. You understood this well

enough a month or six weeks ago. The attitude of an impartial looker-on which you took at that time is the only one to preserve."

"You told me then that I had no right to sit by and fiddle; I've taken your advice," said Helen.

"I never advised you to meddle with this!"

"It's a piece of business in which no lady can take a hand," said the President.

"But Miss Long is a lady," objected Helen.

"I differ with you there, Mrs. Thurston," said the President. "None of those people are gentlefolks as you and I would define it."

"In regard to the Longs you are mistaken, sir!" said Trenholm, hastily.

"Not at all! They belong to what we might call the fanatical, hard-headed, penurious New England peasantry. Even the negroes recognize this,—they treat them differently."

"I happen to know that Miss Simmons comes from a family that has influenced the destinies of this country as far back as its history goes; and, as for poor Miss Edwards, she is really a born aristocrat; we are all of us nobodies when we come to compare ourselves with Miss Simmons and Miss Edwards!" As she spoke Helen picked up one of the little essays and held it carefully in the tongs over the fire. Trenholm watched this performance with fascinated curiosity.

"What you say is extremely interesting," said the President, courteously, "and while it may be true of these ladies here, I still feel that the majority of the people who come South in this mistaken, not to say —ah—meddlesome way, are of the class I spoke of;

the New England peasantry—" the old gentleman did not like to give up his phrase.

" You speak of the New England peasantry," said Helen, trying hard to keep her temper. " I suppose you mean the men whose ancestors were alternately preachers and farmers, like mine and my father's. Men whose ideals are for the soul and not for the body. Plain men, who cared to achieve something more than a thoroughly complete and comfortable system of good-living; men who toiled for intangible things, who put themselves and their own comfort last and their country and the elevation of mankind first! "

Thurston smiled broadly as he noted Helen carefully continuing to fumigate her essays.

" May I ask, Mrs. Thurston," said Trenholm, " what it is you are doing with those pieces of paper? "

" She is fumigating them," said Thurston, quietly, " as a preliminary to engaging in the elevation of mankind."

Helen looked up with a dazed expression. " Oh," she said, " these are the Mission school compositions."

" Why should you fumigate them? " demanded the President.

" I do not know, unless it is that I prefer the smell of smoke."

" And how much good do you expect to do when you go at this work in that spirit? " asked Trenholm.

" It is not the spirit at all; it is a mere sensitiveness of the flesh! "

" And while you take an attitude like this toward the negro, you Northerners pretend to instruct us how to treat them! We, who have known what it is to

love them and be loved by them for generations, with a devotion that at times did not stop short of the sacrifice of life itself!" cried the President.

"I thought that one of the most serious objections you had to the people at the Mission was that they didn't sufficiently keep the negroes at a distance, and here you and Mr. Trenholm are finding fault with me——"

Trenholm turned and looked keenly at Helen; she flushed suddenly. "You are unfair," he said, "and you are too intelligent not to know it."

"Neither Mr. Trenholm nor myself could commit the discourtesy, madam, of finding fault with so charming a lady in her own house," said the President, formally; "but I must beg you again to refrain from interfering in a matter you so manifestly do not understand."

"Mrs. Thurston understands perfectly, sir!" said Trenholm.

At that moment the door was thrown open. "Dr. Rider to see Mis' Helen," said the servant, putting in her head.

Trenholm laughed. "It's time for me to go; you are the third this evening," he said, as the Doctor entered the room.

"Third what?"

"Third remonstrant."

"And I am only surprised that I am not the thirty-third! You must give it up, Mrs. Thurston! You'll make more trouble in ten days than you can remedy in a lifetime!"

"Just what I have been telling her," said Trenholm.

"Oh, you! A pretty one you are! Why don't you set about removing the beam—" he stopped, seeing the President. And Trenholm, murmuring something about another engagement, bade them good-night and left the room.

"The question of the colored race," said the rector, seating himself deliberately, "is one in which we will brook no interference. It is our own problem; we must be allowed to work it out at our own time and in our own way."

"Have you any way?" asked Helen.

"You forget that we are poor, madam, we are staggering under an intolerable burden of debt. It needs money for these things, and for that we look to the North."

"The North does give money."

"And that is all we ask of it," said the President, finally. "We must remedy our own abuses, madam; your efforts at assistance—by you I mean, of course, your countrymen——"

"You are my countryman," Helen put in by way of parenthesis, and the President bowed as if in acknowledgment of a personal compliment.

"Your efforts at assistance," he continued, "have been conducted on such mistaken principles, and your methods of work have been so frequently of such an —a—ah—almost offensive character that you can't blame us if we find ourselves unable to co-operate with you."

"But I do blame you—you should tell us how our principles are mistaken and where our methods are offensive."

"We did tell it to you," said Dr. Rider, "and we kept on telling it to you for four years; we fired it at you from cannons, and we peppered it at you with muskets, and if you all didn't hear, it certainly isn't our fault!"

"The war! We fought it out and we are done with it—now let us go on to other things."

"The South can't go on to other things!" cried Dr. Rider; "the consequences of those times are too present with it. There lies the difference!—But come, come, we're not here to rake up old scores; we've come to prevent your involving your husband in what may be an extremely disagreeable political complication."

"My husband has nothing to do with it," said Helen, glancing impatiently at Thurston, who sat listening, as if the discussion did not concern him. "I am going to teach a few little colored children spelling and reading and arithmetic, not for any political or sociological purposes, but to oblige a tired, sick young girl who has broken down from over-work and worry; and I can't see why such a simple act should create so much disturbance."

"But it is not a simple act," said the rector; "it's a very rash and headstrong act, and if you will not take advice, I think you should be coerced."

"You are going to put yourself in a position—here where your whole future must be lived—entirely outside of the good offices and kindly wishes of those with whom you are thrown," said the President.

"I have never lived where people were deterred from doing what they thought was right by the buzz of public opinion," said Helen.

"The people in your part of the country," said Thurston, "have never, in your time, been brought face to face with a crisis like this; and as for public opinion, it is something that must be reckoned with by everyone who desires to make reforms. I shall not interfere, but I think that you would be wiser to wait until you know more of the place, and of the circumstances."

"Your husband is right, Mrs. Thurston," said the rector; "you must have patience, ma'am."

"You must submit your judgment to your husband's experience and give this folly up!" said the President.

"And yet,—her folly may be better than our wisdom, sir," said Thurston, in a low voice. "Experience, after all, is earth-bound."

There was a short silence, the three men waited with anxious faces.

"I cannot give it up and retain my self-respect," faltered Helen, at last.

"Then," said Thurston, gently, "go on with it."

The President jumped to his feet. "This is pure insanity!" he said; "and as for you, madam, you may find that the loss of your self-respect would have been a far less serious calamity than the loss of your husband!—Good-night, Thurston, I think you will see in the end that you must exert your authority and put a stop to this matter, peremptorily, so long as Mrs. Thurston will not listen to reason."

"Have I had the opportunity of listening to reason?" inquired Helen.

"Tut, tut!" said the rector, with an appreciative grin of disapproval.

"Good-night, madam," said the President. "Rider, I'll take you home if you like."

For a few seconds after they had gone Helen and Thurston did not speak. Then she turned to him with both hands outstretched; but Thurston did not see, he was leaning over the fire and poking down the ashes.

Helen stood irresolute. "You were good to support me," she said.

"I did not support you," Thurston answered, lifelessly.

She waited a moment looking at him, puzzled and hurt. Thurston poked the fire a little more violently, went and turned up his lamp, rattled his papers, and arranged his pens on the desk; finally he looked up at her expectantly, with the air of a person who wishes his room to himself. Helen gathered the smoky essays together, and went away.

XXXIV

THE FACE OF THE INTRUDER

IT was not late when the President and the rector left and Helen, after coming away from Thurston's study, threw a wrap around her and went out of doors. The garden at the side of the house was planted thickly in shrubbery, with here and there great branching pecan-trees and water-oaks; little box-bordered paths wound about in a sort of maze, and at the extreme edge of the grounds stood a small dilapidated summer-house, guarded by quaintly clipped pyramids of mock-orange. Helen walked slowly in this direction, thinking to gain a few minutes of quiet. She thought that she had made a strange, shattering discovery. "Philip dislikes me!" she murmured. "What have I done?"

But to the dear sins of our wilful unconsciousness we are commonly blind until it is too late, and she had only "left undone." Thurston's championship had given her a momentary feeling of security and happiness that moved her to a profound recognition of her need of his support; the trust and affection he had shown had been a solution of difficulties and a reprieve from pain; but, all at once, his helping hand had been withdrawn: cruelly, it seemed to her, and capriciously. She had not conceived of his intolerable annoyance at

having been compelled to defend her against the men whose good opinions were of most value to him, nor of the sore hurt she had given him in her cold disregard of his interests and in her quiet insensibility to the danger to which she might expose him.

She walked slowly toward the summer-house. She had been for weeks like one who holds a door against an intruder: an intruder whom instinctively she did not wish to face; for love turned away unrecognized is the sooner forgotten. But Trenholm had been impatient, almost rude; she had seen herself in his eyes divested of approbation, and, in the hurt of it, the face of the unknown had almost appeared; then she had turned to Thurston for help and had been refused; now she must think it out alone. As she neared the summer-house she heard a sound of voices.

"Are you better?" It was a man that spoke, and in a tone of anxiety.

A short silence followed, then a woman answered, weakly: "You should not have followed me; you startled me."

"Forgive me, I left the Thurstons early and walked a quarter of a mile or so beyond your house to finish my cigar. I had only come in sight of your gate when I saw you leave it."

"How could you tell it was I, in the darkness?"

"You ask how I could tell!" said the man, softly. —"I was alarmed when I saw you on that lonely road, and so I followed you."

"When I heard your steps behind me—I ran. I—" the woman's voice died away.

"You must let me go for help."

"No, I am better. I came out to tell Mrs. Thurston that she must not teach to-morrow."

The mention of her name brought Helen to herself. "I am here," she said, "I came out for a breath of fresh air."

Trenholm and Miriam had both risen when Helen came forward; but Miriam, with the embarrassed, weak laugh of a person who finds her strength suddenly leaving her, sat down upon the bench again. "I came to tell you," she panted, "that I should take my classes myself to-morrow."

"You will not be able," said Helen; "don't think of it."

"I will take you home at once," said Trenholm.

"Let me stay and speak with Mrs. Thurston," pleaded Miriam.

Helen could not see them, but their voices gave her a strange pain; she sat down on the bench at Miriam's side.

"Mr. Thurston will take me home," said Miriam.

Trenholm waited a moment—no one spoke; then with a faint laugh, half defiance, half defeat, he bent over Miriam, took her hand, and regardless of Helen, stooped and kissed it. "I shall see you to-morrow," he said, and went away.

"Come," said Helen, "come into the house;" but she did not move, and her voice sounded in her own ears as if far away.

"Wait a moment—can't we stay here for a while? The moon is rising. The houses are so hot these nights.—I do not sleep, and yet I am so tired, so very tired."

"I am afraid you are going to be ill. Something is wrong with you."

"Nothing but living."

"You are too young for that; life is before you,—and—happiness."

Miriam did not answer for a moment, and then she covered her face with her hands and sobbed softly.

Helen drew a long breath. "Are you hurt?" she asked, dully, with the vague feeling we have when some accident has happened.

The moon coming up over the tops of the trees shone in on them, and Miriam lifted her head and looked at Helen, wonderingly. "Hurt?" she echoed; "do you mean——"

"The special election, are you worrying over that?" Helen spoke hurriedly; she dreaded explanations. Miriam seized upon the suggestion.

"You knew that the special election had been called? My father has consented to run for the State Legislature."

"Who is advising him?" asked Helen, conscious of a desire to gain time.

"Mr. Johnson; he tells him that he will be in a position to do more good, and—my father is in favor of retaining the college here. Mr. Johnson thinks he has a chance of combining——"

"Don't allow it!" interrupted Helen. "Ask Mr. Trenholm to speak to your father."

"It is too late, my father left home this afternoon; he is to make some speeches in the country; but even if he hadn't gone I hardly think that it would be wise to trouble Mr. Trenholm."

"Why not? You know him; isn't he a friend of yours?" said Helen. "I must get this over!" she thought.

"Yes," said Miriam, recovering her self-possession; "but I have not seen him for—for some time, and he would advise my father entirely from a Southern point of view."

"He would advise him disinterestedly at least. The other man has no sense of honor."

"And Mr. Trenholm, at least in politics, has?" Miriam spoke with an affectation of indifference.

"What do you mean?" Helen asked, coldly.

"They understand things so differently here," said Miriam, awkwardly. "You knew him in the North; was he—did he—was his manner the same in the North?"

"His manner? Toward whom?" said Helen, impatiently.—"I never noticed anything peculiar in his manner!"

"Oh, toward anybody," said Miriam; "younger women, for example; you know how he behaves here in Tallawara."

"Do you mean the spontaneous and child-like manner in which he flirts with Zoë Mason?"

"Flirts?"

"Of course; they only play at love-making; they are not in earnest."

"But it came to me, lately, in a roundabout way,—through the negroes, I am ashamed to say,—that Mr. Trenholm and Zoë Mason have been engaged to be married ever since she was a child."

"Oh, that is nothing but a part of the game."

"Suppose one of them took the game seriously?"

"They are both Southerners."

"But what if they were not? In that case Mr. Trenholm might unconsciously be taken more seriously than he—than he would wish. It might be awkward,—for him."

Helen did not answer for some moments. "It does not seem possible," she said, at last, "that a man like Mr. Trenholm could allow himself to be so misunderstood."

"But if a woman of average common-sense were to feel that he had distinctly assured her that he cared for her, would she be justified in—in—well, in taking him seriously enough to allow herself to—trust him?"

"I cannot judge—I do not wish to judge! It would depend upon what Trenholm had said,—upon—so many things! The woman, you know,—might be apt to think that men—" Helen stopped, she knew that she was temporizing.

"This woman—" began Miriam.

"Ah!" said Helen, shrinking back a little, as if in pain.

"I am supposing a woman who does not think anyone makes love to her!"

Helen smiled in spite of herself at the indignant ring in the girl's tones. "If you mean that she is a woman to whom no one ever made love—then, she is not to be depended upon at all."

"Several people, quite enough for her to know it when she sees it, have—fallen in love with her before."

Helen leaned back into the shadow and said nothing.

Miriam sat looking up at the moon, waiting for a

word of help or encouragement. It did not come. "Has Mr. Trenholm never spoken of me to you?" she asked.

"Nothing beyond the most fleeting mention."

"And you have seen so much of him lately!" sighed the girl.

"If he had spoken of you, what should he have said?"

"I met him last spring, when I first came to live this—this horrible life! But he went away—and things seemed worse than ever. Then papa took me down to the sea-shore and he followed us, it seemed to me—" she stopped; the moon rose higher, and her face, as she leaned forward, showed clearly against the background of the close-leaved trees. "Oh, I can't tell it!" she cried, passionately; "it is like tearing out my soul!—But last autumn I came back here full of an idiotic, unquestioning happiness; it seemed as if it needed but a word from him to make it all reality, and that that word had been left unspoken only through accident; if my father had not come in at one time: if somebody had not interrupted at another: if some business had not intervened — little chances that made no difference. I was glad when they occurred; I helped them on—I—I like things,—beautiful things, when they are not—defined; and besides, I was sure, foolishly sure! I didn't even care to have him speak, I believed in him so. But before long I began to see more of Miss Locke, and she told me — a great many things; a horrible little doubt began to creep in. Still, they never went down to the post-office that I did not expect my father to hear

from him;—but the letter never came. At last, I began to fear that he had been playing, simply playing—the old, familiar game that I never had learned, but that they all know, down here. Then, that night —two weeks ago, when the dreadful thing happened to me—he had not been gone from the house an hour. I had sent him away, because he had no right to come when he knew that my father and the others were not at home; and yet, even then, he—he gave me to understand that he had come because—he cared, and I was happy, horribly happy! It was that that made the shock of the other so frightful.—But since then I have not seen him; if he cared, wouldn't he have come?—And yet, you saw yourself, a few minutes ago, when he left me with you—you saw—" In the dim light the girl's eyes dropped to her hand that trembled a little as she lifted it slightly, with furtive care, as if something had alighted upon it that might fly away. "Am I wrong in thinking—?" Her voice died like a sigh.

"I can—not—tell." The words fell slowly, out of the shadows.

"But he is too great," pleaded Miriam. "He is Trenholm! He—he knows how we are made as a watchmaker knows the mechanism of a watch; he would never trifle with serious things. If he had been a boy, or even an ordinary man, it might have been different. Don't you see"—she leaned toward Helen, trying to look into her face—"that I can't believe that he has not meant it? It would be treacherous to think it of him; there is something that I can't understand. One does not play with love," she concluded.

Helen smiled at the unconscious plagiarism. Pain gives a finer edge to these things. "And yet," she said, "perhaps—unconsciously—unintentionally he has——"

"Not Trenholm!"

"We are talking about—Jim!"

"Oh!" Miriam cried out. "That isn't fair! That is unjust! He is Jim, of course, to all these people who have always known him. It is what is so beautiful about him! He is sometimes, here in Tallawara, like a darling, naughty little boy! He is even afraid of Dr. Rider and Miss Locke; it is a wonderful, simple side of his character—you don't understand—you don't appreciate——"

"Hush!" said Helen, with sudden vivacity. "You must stop talking to me about him! You must not care! I can't listen! You are sowing the wind——"

"And I shall reap the whirlwind!" cried the girl, magnificently. "With joy that I know how!"

Then she sank fainting against the back of the seat, and Helen ran, frightened, to the house, calling for Thurston, who came hurrying out to help her, almost at the first sound of her voice.

After they had taken Miriam home they came back together. "She is very ill," Thurston said; "I don't like it—her hands were on fire."

"Yes."

They were standing under the hall lamp; he looked down at her curiously. "How strange you look! This has unnerved you!" He reached his hand toward her as if to touch her forehead. "Are you feverish, too?"

Helen avoided his touch. "Yes, I am feverish, too!"

"What can I do for you?" he inquired, solicitously.

"Nothing, now," and she climbed wearily up the stairs.

XXXV

DOUBT

TRENHOLM walked slowly toward his own place, that lay black in the shadows at the foot of the hill. It was necessary to pull hard at the great sagging iron gate that opened grudgingly, leaving him scarcely room to pass. It had slanted in the same way against the ground outside longer than Trenholm could remember; but he had grown accustomed to it, he even preferred it.

The dark-foliaged branches of the water-oaks were clashing noiselessly over his head in some mysterious upper current of air; as he passed around the wide curve of the driveway, a tangle of damp gray moss brushed his cheek with a gentle ghostly greeting, and he bent low to escape the straggling branches of japonica that stretched across his path.

He went up the steps, and, feeling for the door-knob, let himself into the house. The hall was dark, and the air full of the nauseating odor of a burned-out kerosene lamp; he scratched a match, and, holding it high above him, opened the door of the library. The fire in the grate had burned to a dull spark, there was no other light, and the lamp itself was gone. Trenholm opened a window. In front of him he could see, in dim gray outline, the rail of the wide porch, and at some distance a bright thread of yellow outlined

the doors and gleamed through the cracks of a cabin in the garden below.

"Louis," he shouted, angrily; "Louis!"

The light disappeared.

"Louis!" Trenholm's voice was threatening.

"Dat you, Mars' Jim?" the response came sleepily.

"What do you mean by leaving me here in the dark?"

"I done lef' a light in de hall, Mars' Jim, an' I'm a-fillin' yo' big lamp now."

"What are you filling it out there for?"

"De ain't any coal-oil in de house, I'm jus' a-puttin' in a little of mine."

Minutes passed and Trenholm was growing impatient. "Are you going to bring that lamp? Or shall I come myself?" he called.

The threat seemed to be alarming; there was a hurried scuffle of feet. "Fo' de lan's sake, niggah, don't go to fillin' it red hot, or you'll blow us all to Kingdom come 'fo' we knows it."

Trenholm laughed as the remonstrating voice came up to him. The spark of fire had already died in the grate and he sat there in the dark. After two or three minutes more of delay a round, bright circle began to move across the ceiling, and out in the garden, down a narrow path bordered high with box, Louis came hobbling with the lighted lamp. A crowd of anxious faces shining gray in the faint moonlight, peered after him through the door of the cabin; the tall shrubs arched over him and a thick black shadow fell behind him; Trenholm went back and seated himself at his table. The old man's halting steps could

be heard coming up the porch stairs, and through the hall; he opened the door, and the porcelain shade of the lamp beat a clicking tattoo on the chimney while he stood still and attempted to bow.

"Take care!" said Trenholm, impatiently. "You'll break something, and the next time you want to illuminate for an evening party, do it with another lamp."

"Yes, suh, I will, suh," said the old man, respectfully, then he shivered and looked guiltily at the fire.

"I don't wonder you shiver," said Trenholm, severely. "Do you want to kill me? Why didn't you have a fire here?"

"I didn't 'spect you back so soon, suh! An' afteh de prayer-meetin' I was detained by de Mayor on account ob de derangements to-morrow." Louis spoke with great dignity.

"What is going on to-morrow?"

"Mostly de colored people wanted to celebrate de birfday ob Mist' Abr'um Linkum. We all gwine hole some services in de churches, an' we did want a procession; but we been warned off, suh; so we had to gib it up."

"Why?" asked Trenholm, indifferently.

"Can't say, suh; de 'scuse dey *gib* was on account ob de prisonehs."

"The prisoners? What prisoners?"

"Well, suh, you see, suh, Misteh Gus Johnson's contrack fo' de prisoners on dat Crown County plantation has jus' run out."

"Hah!" exclaimed Trenholm.

"Ob course dose prisonehs would natchually go

to de Prestonpans jail, but de sheriff down at Prestonpans,—he 'Fessoh Yarnell's brudder, suh,—foun' he jus' hatto patch up dat ole jail befo' it could hole dose prisonehs, so he done sont down heah to ouah sheriff,—he's 'Fessoh Yarnell's cousin,—an' ouah sheriff tole ole Billy Yarnell to fotch 'em along heah an' he'd keep 'em all night."

Trenholm burst out laughing.

"Yes, suh," said Louis, as if he were answering a question; "dat what I say too, suh. But de Mayor when he heard dere was a Linkum procession planned fo' to-morrow mornin' say he reckon dat procession betteh be guv up fo' feah it might make dose prisonehs discou'aged!"

"I wonder why Johnson didn't renew the contract?" Trenholm spoke to himself more than to Louis.

"Well, suh, dey do say dat he tried his bes'; but dat owin' to some misunderstandin' wiv ole Billy——"

"Mr. William Yarnell?" said Trenholm, suddenly and sharply.

"Yes, suh! Cert'nly suh! What was I a-sayin', suh? Oh, yes! Owin' to some misunderstandin', ole Misteh William Billy done gave de contrack out to some odder somebody. An' de mos' discou'aged pusson in Tallawara won't be de prisonehs, to-morrow, I reckon. When folkses heahs how dat manager ob Gus Johnson's——"

"Are you ever going to build that fire?" said Trenholm, coldly. "This place is as damp as a tomb."

"Yes, suh! Yes, suh! I gwine build it right off, suh!"

Old Louis hobbled out of the room and soon returned with a bundle of thin pine kindlings. Removing the half-live coals with his bare hands, he built the sticks into a little log-cabin, and then held a blazing splinter under the erection; the fat, resinous lightwood sputtered like a torch, and Louis piled great lumps of coal on top of it that sizzled like bacon in a frying pan.

Trenholm came forward and spread his hands to the blaze, looking about him with a little discontented shiver before he settled himself in the deep, comfortable corner at the end of a large old-fashioned sofa which was drawn up near the fire-place. That sofa had been a costly piece of furniture in its day; fat rosewood cupids and curling dragons ornamented the arms and back, and the deep red plush of the covering was only less hideous to the eye than it was to the touch. Bookcases with sliding glass-doors lined the room, and in the centre stood a dining-table covered with writing materials and manuscript. A magnificent chandelier, with crystal pendants, hung from the middle of the ceiling, and the floor was covered with a pale Moquette, so dirty and threadbare that the garlands of lilies and roses were almost invisible. Tall pillars in an archway separated the room from the next, where, through the half-closed folding-door, could be seen the glimmer of more crystal pendants and many large mirrors, with gilded frames and rounding tops ornamented with flourishing scroll-work and more fat cupids, golden brothers of the rosewood figures on the sofa.

Old Louis continued to putter about the room un-

easily, plainly anxious that his master should speak again.

"Why don't you follow Mr. Long's advice," said Trenholm, impatiently, "and let politics alone? I thought you swore by Mr. Long."

"I does, suh, I does," said Louis, apologetically, "but Misteh Long, he—he—he's gone away!"

"But I thought you said you were at prayer-meeting, this evening?"

"Dat's de Methodis'," said Louis, hesitatingly.

"Oh, look here, Louis, you are not going to desert Mr. Long!" remonstrated Trenholm.

"No, suh! Certainly not, suh—but—but my Liza's Georgie, she's mighty slow about gettin' her religion, and we all thought we'd take her to the Methodis's fo' a time or two to see if dey couldn't hur'y her up. She bin seekin' now fo' de las' six weeks, an' it 'pears to me if she's gwine to find she'd betteh scuffle. Dey bin havin' a right sma't revival down at de Methodises; mos' too sma't, fo' I don' hold with dese yere quick conversions. I was jus' tellin' Liza dat Georgie'd betteh be slow dan suah; dese yere peart niggahs dat's so mighty suah's gwine ter fin' out de diff'rence when it comes to de Las' Day. Dey'll be plenty ob 'surance on de goats' side."

"But what will Mr. Long say when he finds that one of the pillars of his church has been going to the Methodist meeting?"

"I ain't so much of a pillow, Mars' Jim, as I is a bolsteh; an' I'se jus' a-leavin' dose niggahs up dere to fin' out how dey gwine stand up alone."

"That's a dangerous game, for as soon as they find

they can do it they'll want to put their knowledge into practice."

"Let 'em try it," said old Louis, bitterly; "let 'em try it. If dey wishes to run dere church like a funeral hearse—let 'em! Folks is gwine wha' folkses gets de mos' good, an' not wha' dey fin' it de mos' cool and quiet. No, suh, I don't want no cooked-over col' religion; I likes my religion hot."

"So do I," said Trenholm, sympathetically, "but I should think Mr. Long gave it to you hot enough. I have heard him promise you all a thorough warming some day."

"I don't give a snap for ole Mist' Long's hell! It's like one of dese yere musta'd-plasters dat's mo'n half flour; dey ain't no sting in it. I tell yo', Mars' Jim, dese yere niggahs wants a hell dat'll draw de badness out'n 'em with teahs an' groans ob anguish—dat's what dey want. An' dey ain't a-gettin' it like dey ought, suh. Dem dat'd gib it to 'em is choked off in the bud, suh!"

Old Louis came and stood behind Trenholm for a moment, resting his elbow on the back of the sofa.

Trenholm did not turn his head. "They are none of them getting it 'like they ought,'" he repeated, almost dejectedly. "Perhaps you and I, Louis, are not the ones to give it to them."

"I donno 'bout you, Mars' James; but I mus' say dat a man what's foun' religion fou'teen times ought to know what he's talkin' 'bout. I'se been justified, an I'se been sanctified——"

"I thought you were a good Presbyterian."

"An' so I is! None ob youah poor, ole, mean, white-trash Methodis' sanctification fo' me! My sanc-

tification'll wash. An' what I practises I preaches, an' what I preaches I practises. I don' fo'bid de breddern to eat meat sacrificed to idols and den de fus' chance I gits go gobblin' down de bigges' hunk I can fine m'ownse'f! I don' go 'roun' sayin, '*'Void politics, 'void politics!*' an' den, jus' cause he axes me, bite into dat low-down Gus Johnson's persimmon, to fine out ef it'll pucker, fo' him! I don' skip my prayer-meetin's to go out 'lectioneerin' fo' special 'lections——"

"What has gone out electioneering?"

"Ole Mist' Long."

"Who?"

"Ole Mist' Long, suh." Louis repeated his announcement, vaguely disappointed at Trenholm's quiet tone.

"What does he expect to gain by it?" Trenholm said, half to himself.

"Nuffin, suh; 'less 'tis he specks to get away by it. Ole Mist' Long don't seem de same man since dat time ob de chivaree."

Trenholm's chin went up an inch or two, and then his neck stiffened. Louis waited in vain for some expression of opinion; at last, finding that nothing more was forthcoming, he stole quietly away. Trenholm did not notice his going.

From some far bleak, upland country the wind came roving across the bare plantations, whistling up the driveway, shrieking through the thick trees, moaning at all the corners of the empty old house, and pouring itself into every cranny with shrill, inquisitive screams; all its voices chanted a burden of questioning and of doubt.

XXXVI

BOUND IN AFFLICTION AND IRON

"DE prisonehs gwine come frough on de 'leben o'clock, suh," said Louis next morning, "an' I reckon 'bout all de colored folks in Tallawara'll be down street seein' dere frien's."

"You can go; but—keep out of mischief."

"All right, suh, I will, suh!" and Louis sauntered grinning down the street, affably greeting his colored fellow-townsmen on the way.

A subdued excitement lighted every face, and the air was full of turbulence and discontent; all sorts of old scores were being raked up, and every colored man vied with his fellow in tales of injustice and oppression.

"Yes; Ailsa hadn't been dere two days befo' she sassed de manager, 'til he got so hoppin' mad he jus' knocked her down," said one of them, raising his voice as Louis passed.

"You heah dat, Unc' Louis?" called the young woman to whom the man was speaking.

Louis paused: politely deferential to a lady, but by no means a prey to vulgar curiosity. "How come you heah tell o' dat?" he asked, indifferently.

"I done got it from a man dat knows a woman dat knows a man dat works on Gus Johnson's plantation."

"Mighty roundabout way ob hearin'!" said Louis, craning his neck in apparent interest in something farther down the street.

"Is de prisonehs comin'?" asked the woman, excitedly.

"No," said Louis; "t'ain't nuffin but one o' dese yere 'yaller dogs' crossin' de street."

The three giggled secretly as Mr. Danny Wilson came toward them. "Oh, move along here!" he said, "you mustn't crowd up the streets this way; there's no room for anybody to get by. Move along; don't bunch up on the corner!"

Louis's eyes glittered as he reluctantly strolled on with the other two. "You heah tell anythin' 'bout Hannibal?" he asked.

"Well, dey do say dat de firs' time de manager came out afteh he'd knocked Ailsa down, Hannibal, he went fo' him, an' knocked de manager down hisse'f."

"Jus' like dat fool! Knockin' down an overseer 'cause he hit Ailsa a crack! Ef 't had been me," said Louis, vindictively, "I'd a gone up to dat manageh an' thanked him, I would; I'd 'a' thanked him politely fo' doin' his duty.—Whar is doze two at now?"

"Dat's all I knows," said the man, stolidly.

The three separated to join some other of the knots that gathered at the corners and in front of the shops, but wherever they stopped, before long some white man would come by, a little pale, quite determined, and yet with an air of seeming indifference, repeating Danny Wilson's, "Oh, move along, here! Don't bunch up this way on the corners!" And the group

of negroes, like a herd of sheep, would disperse hither and yon, only to gather again at some other spot. At eleven o'clock the streets grew clearer, for the crowd of blacks had turned in the direction of the railroad station.

Chained together, two and two, the prisoners from Prestonpans walked up the middle of the road, tattered, hatless, shoeless, and shivering; their gleeful eyes glittering in fever, and their gaunt faces running over with mirth. Wild bursts of laughter from the Tallawara negroes greeted each acquaintance, while retorts and compliments were bandied gayly between the fettered and the free. Light-hearted, careless, unconscious of either shame or misery, the objects of municipal discipline were apparently enjoying a social occasion of unusual magnitude with the utmost complaisance; but underneath it all seethed rebellion and anger; and at the sight of the suffering plainly imprinted on the greater number of those jubilant black faces, the lookers-on consulted each other's eyes, saying in their sombre glance the things they dared not speak; for even when justice had been administered, when they knew the culprit guilty and the chastisement deserved, these immature and undeveloped human creatures were incapable of seeing anything but the cruel whip of the ancient master in the hand that meted out punishment.

Louis darted in and out among the crowd trying to satisfy, by stolen interviews with the prisoners, the devouring curiosity he always felt in regard to Ailsa.

" Ain't seed nor heard ob her fo' nearly two weeks."

—" Hannibal had de bigges' kin' ob a row wiv de man-

ager 'bout ten days ago, an' one night he an' Ailsa lef' out wivout sayin' nothin' to nobody."—"Spec' dey's hidin' somewhars down by Prestonpans. Hannibal's 'fraid Gus Johnson'll ketch him an' make him work his time out!"—"I reckon you all wouldn't know Hannibal ef you seed him, Unc' Louis. He looks mighty like somebody'd conjured him; he tole me one day dat his blood was jus' a bu'nin' up in his veins."

"Get out there!" one of the guards shouted. "No whispering with the prisoners!—That you, Uncle Louis? I'm surprised at you! You know better than that!" and Louis fell back with one more mortification to add to the list of humiliations that seemed to be filling up his day.

So far as it went the information he had gleaned was correct. Ailsa had given Helen to understand that Hannibal was still at the Crown County plantation; but the truth was that they had escaped together, and Hannibal had been left behind in the swamps near Prestonpans, while Ailsa made the journey to Tallawara. About noon on the day after she had seen Helen she got back to Hannibal; some friendly teamster of her acquaintance had offered her a lift on the way down, and had agreed to take them both within a mile of the Guthrie mansion on his return the next day. But when the time came Hannibal seemed ill almost to the point of death, and if it had not been for Ailsa's fiery will and stinging tongue he would have sunk down where he was and given up the struggle. All through the long drive he lay back in the jolting wagon with his head in Ailsa's lap, his eyes

half open, and his face gray with the terrible pallor of the stricken African. When they came to the cross-road where their ways diverged the teamster helped him down and watched him anxiously as he tottered unsteadily on his feet. "My land, Ailsa, y'ain't never gwine get him to de Guthrie mansion. You all'd better come along home wiv me," but Ailsa refused.

"'Tain't no time to give up now," she said, "an' we all's hid out all we's gwine to. We's gwine home, we is!"

The good-natured fellow drove away, and Hannibal made a great effort to move on briskly.

"It's only a little piece mo'," said Ailsa, "an' we'll res' when we gits dere. Keep up!"

"I can't keep up," said Hannibal, "dey broke my back down dere when day strung me up an' lashed me dat-a-way. Sumpin's gone inside me; I cain't walk."

Ailsa tucked her arm in Hannibal's. "Oh, come 'long, nigger! We ain't got no time to lose. You all want ter git back befo' de spring plantin', don't you?"

"De ain't nebber gwine be no mo' spring fo' me!"

"All right den, don' you worry. I'll git some work and let you jus' rest up until you gits over your hurts."

"My hurts is inside, in my min', Ailsa."

"Oh, shut up you mouf, you ain't de first nigger dat's had a whippin'," said Ailsa, contemptuously.

Hannibal lifted his head. "Ailsa, you 'membeh hearin' my ole mammy tell about de time dey whup my gran'daddy? Dey done sumpin' mean to him, and he sot down in his tracks jus' like I did down dere

in Crown County, an' he said he wouldn't do anodder stroke; den dey whup him, to make him do it, an' dey couldn't,—no mo' dan dey could me! When dey got done dey lef' him dere on de ground; but fust dey took a pail o' wateh, an' dey mix it full o' salt, like mush, an' dey took a paddle an' broke de blisters on his back an' rub in dat salt wateh, *hard*, an' when dey done dat, dey jus' broke his heart! He never lif' up his head afteh dat; he lay dere an' he die dere, an' —I gwine lay down an' die too."

Ailsa's eyes were suddenly softened by a spray of tears. "Don't you talk dat-a-way, Hannibal; don't you know I cain't do wivout you?"

Hannibal looked at her a moment, shrewdly and keenly, laughed a little, then shambled on.

"I mean it," said Ailsa.

"All right, ef you means it you does; all de same I gwine die, fust chance I gets."

Ailsa trudged on, her brow dark, and her mind full of plans of revenge. "Wait till I gits hold ob Gus Johnson," she said, every once in a while; "wait till I gits hold of him. He'll wish he'd neveh been born."

But Hannibal was too dulled by his heavy burden of shame and suffering to pay any attention.

When they neared the Guthrie mansion they slipped into Billy's deserted cabin from the back, well out of sight of the windows of the great house, for they were afraid of Johnson, and Hannibal sank down wearily on a ragged, damp pallet in the corner of the room. "You stay heah," said Ailsa; "I gwine see what I can find."

She crept cautiously up on the wide porch, trying the back-doors and peering in through the closed shutters of the rooms on the lower floor; but everything was well locked.

Muttering to herself discontentedly she came back to Hannibal. "Lemme down frough dat hole," she commanded; "we all's 'bleeged to have ouah suppeh."

"'Taint safe," said Hannibal, who was lying near the wall of a small closet at one side of the cabin. "Dat hole come mighty near cavin' in on us de las' time we went in it, an' I'se too tight a fit to want to try it again!"

"You wouldn't be no too tight fit now!" and, taking hold of one corner of the pallet, Ailsa unceremoniously spilled him off. "Talk about a camel goin' frough a needle's eye! If you tried to get into de Kingdom dat-a-way now, you is so mighty thin dat you'd get los' in dat needle's eye an' nobody could fin' you!"

Hannibal stumbled to the other side of the room, and Ailsa loosened some boards in the closet that revealed an unexpected recess in the chimney. "What fo' you all gwine down dere anyway? Anything dat's stayed down dere mo'n fo' weeks isn't gwine be fit to eat."

Ailsa was slowly disappearing, apparently into the bowels of the earth. "Dere's plenty 'nuff to eat in de Guthrie mansion—I gwine in to call on Gus Johnson," she said.

Hannibal started forward. "You don' mean dat hole goes frough to de big house? Woman, what's

goin' to hindeh me f'um hittin' you a crack on de haid an' buryin' you wha you stand?"

"Shore I don' know, 'less it's cause you all's is mighty hungry fo' you suppeh!" Her mellow laugh came from somewhere underground. Hannibal sank listlessly on the disordered pallet and waited.

The passage to the cellar was but a short one, opening into a closet similar to the one at the cabin end; Ailsa entered it and cautiously opened the cellar-door. It was fortunate that she had been careful; someone was there, and in the dim twilight she could see that Johnson was fumbling about apparently on the same errand as herself, for he cut a slice from a ham that was hanging from the rafters, and, after taking three or four eggs from a wire-screened safe, he went slowly up the stairs.

Ailsa could hardly prevent her teeth from chattering in her head; she believed that Johnson would not hesitate to kill her if he caught her,—an idea engendered by her own well-defined resolution to do the same for him at the first favorable opportunity. She waited until she heard his tread going heavily up the stairway to the second floor; then, cat-like, she came out into the cellar. Johnson had left the long, thin-bladed butcher knife with which he had cut the ham lying on what was called the "swing-shelf." Ailsa went and reaching it down tried the edge on her thumb, —it was sharp; she waved it over her head and chuckled once, very softly; it sounded like some small subterranean water-flow. Then she crept up the stairs after Johnson, her lips curving in smiles of enjoyment, over her small beautiful white teeth.

Next to the room where Johnson usually slept there was a little dressing-room opening upon the landing in the hall. Ailsa slipped in here, and finding the door partially ajar, stood watching. Johnson was making out accounts; for a short time he wrote, and then, closing the ledger, he stood up in front of the fireplace, with his back to her; Ailsa's smiling mouth closed, her eyelids narrowed to a slit.

Johnson put his foot on the fender, and, resting his elbow on the mantel-piece, leaned his forehead on his hand and looked down into the grate. The restless eyes outside swept his powerful figure from head to foot, from foot to head, and back again. The newly built fire suddenly crackled with a sound of sputtering, like burning grease, and a spear of smoky, lurid flame sprang up in one of the fat black lumps of coal.

"Hi dere!" Ailsa cried, suddenly. "What you all thinkin' 'bout?"

Johnson clutched at one of the loaded pistols which lay near him on the mantel-piece, but Ailsa flung open the door and walked into the room, radiant and impudent, laughing aloud.

"What are you doing here?" said Johnson.

"Me? I gwine home, I is."

"Where's Hannibal?"

"Oh, I lef' him down yondeh."

"Where?"

"Crown County," said Ailsa, lying with her usual facility.

Johnson looked about him uneasily; he did not believe her.

"'Tain't de firs' time I lef' him, neider!"

Johnson laughed. The ugly jest restored his confidence in her. "You're just in time," he said, "to cook me some supper."

"All right, I'll go down in de kitchen an' do it; dey ain't nuffin fit to cook wid up heah."

Johnson became wary. "No, you're going to do it here; I brought the things up on purpose."

It was a rude sort of cooking, but as Ailsa fried the eggs and ham, her hunger overcame her, her eyes glistened ravenously, and she stuffed a great piece of the uncooked flesh into her mouth.

"Hello!" said Johnson, after observing her a moment, "you're starving."

She nodded to him; her mouth was full.

"How did you get here?"

"Walked."

"What possessed you to run off?"

"I didn't run off! I lef' out."

"I hope you haven't been getting into trouble down there. Gorrell wrote me that Hannibal was sulky; something about you, wasn't it?"

"Yas," said Ailsa, indifferently; "dat Gorrell hit me, an' Hannibal wouldn't stand it."

Johnson seated himself at the table and ate his supper with leisurely relish. "Hannibal's getting mighty gallant, isn't he?" he said, when he had finished.

Ailsa's eyes flashed. "I tole Gorrell dat you wouldn't stand it, neider."

"Did you?" said Johnson, coolly. "If that's what brought you up here, you might as well have stayed where you were. I can't have any words with Gorrell, he's too valuable to me. What did you sass him for?"

Ailsa made a threatening motion at Johnson's back with the long, keen-bladed knife, but she did not answer.

"What are you going to do next?" he said.

"Gwine back to Tallawara," said Ailsa, sullenly.

"No, you ain't! I can't have you there now! I'm going back myself in about an hour, and I don't want you turning up just as I do; people are talking enough about me as it is; I don't want any more of it." He took out his watch and looked at it. "I've got to start now," he added, "it's later than I thought."

"What time is it?" said Ailsa.

"Seven," said Johnson. "And I'm not going to leave you in this house, either. Come, turn out!"

Ailsa, without a word, left the room, went down the stairs, and out of the back-door.

"I smell ham an' eggs!" said Hannibal, when she came into the cabin. "Lawd, you look like you see'd de ghos'!"

"I seen worse dan de ghos', I'se seen a ghos' to be!" said Ailsa, and then added, inconsequently, "an' I been cookin' suppeh, too."

"Who fuh?"

"Gus Johnson."

Hannibal sprang to his feet, as if galvanized. "Whar?" he shouted.

"You cain't get him now, he's on de road to Tallawara. Heah him goin'," said Ailsa, as the roll of wheels and the thud of a horse's hoofs at a sharp gallop reached their ears.

Hannibal started for the door, with no sign of illness or weakness in his gait.

" If you all gwine to ketch up with Gus Johnson, you betteh have sumpin t'eat firs'. Wait until I git it."

She made her way to the lower floor, deliberately broke a window in the kitchen, unlocked the sash, and went up-stairs to Johnson's room.

One of the pistols still lay on the mantel-piece. " I reckon I'd betteh bring dis home to him," said Ailsa, but there was no more laughter. She bestowed the weapon lovingly in the bosom of her gown, and, gathering up the remains of the supper, carried them back to Hannibal, who did not stop to eat, but took the food in his hands, devouring it ravenously as he hurried on, and Ailsa followed after him, mad with starvation and famished for revenge.

XXXVII

BY FIRE

TOWARD evening a sea of woolly heads hustled and jostled around the Tallawara jail where the cheerful prisoners were pressing their black faces against the bars and shouting hilariously through the unglazed windows. Songs of every description came from the four sides of the dilapidated building, the subjects ranging from the most exalted piety to the rankest indecency, and white women hurried by quickly, trying not to hear. Brinton, edging his way through the crowd with the oft-repeated "Move on here, don't bunch up this way in the middle of the street!" was received with either sullen silence or good-humored protest. "How can I move on, boss? Dey's folks in front heah solid as a brick-wall!"

"Go home then!" said Brinton. "Go home, all of you."

"We ain't gwine home till we's seed ouah frien's," said a voice at a little distance.

"Why n't you sen' you' yaller dogs home?" cried another voice still farther off. Brinton wheeled but could not catch the speaker; a great laugh went up, and a little group of young men who were standing on the steps of Johnson's store moved together more solidly with uplifted heads and white, angry faces.

"You mine out what you say!" growled one of

the negroes to another. "Dey'd sooner shoot into de crowd dan look at us!"

Brinton turned again. "Why, Uncle Louis!" he said, "what are you doing here?"

"I'm tryin' to git a coat to my sister's Billy; de boy's mos' froze; came frough de streets dis mawnin' wiv one ob his bare shouldehs stickin' out frough his shirt."

"Billy! What's Billy in for?"

"Stealin' a shote!"

Brinton looked at him in surprise, the short answer was so unlike Louis's usual exaggerated courtesy.

"Hello, Brinton!" called Danny Wilson from the steps. "What are you doing down there?"

"Trying to persuade some of these niggers to go home," said Brinton, going and standing below him. "If we could only make a diversion they'd all trail away, like sheep, in half an hour."

"Don't you worry about your diversion, my son," whispered Danny Wilson, bending over him benevolently; "you'll get it if you're round anywhere up by the Prestonpans road about nine o'clock."

"Look here, Danny, what are you up to?"

"Oh, we're going to have a little bonfire in honor of Abe Lincoln, and—Mrs. Thurston, and any other benevolent nigger-loving Northerner who cares to appropriate the compliment."

"I'm going up to the Thurstons', and *I don't want anybody to interrupt my call!*" Brinton spoke with meaning.

"All right!" said Danny, "we won't come in without sending in our cards."

Brinton half turned to remonstrate with the others, but Danny put out a warning hand. "You all better look out how you put anything into the fellows' heads besides what's there already!" he whispered. "Go along up to your Thurstons' and keep a sharp look-out. Nobody's thought of them yet, but there's no tellin' how they'd act if they should think of them."

An hour or more later Brinton was sitting in Helen's drawing-room listening to her account of the day's work, for Miriam had been worse and Helen had again taken her place.

"I waked to find myself famous," she said. "If I had counted all the colored people I knew in Tallawara I should have doubted whether they would mount quite up to ten; but this morning when I went out every darkey I met sang out, 'Howdy, Mis' Thurston! Howdy, Mis' Thurston! Howdy, Mis' Thurston!' They didn't mean to be disrespectful, but the recognition was a little too universal to be comfortable."

"What can you expect?" said Brinton. "You're their brass-band, you know, Mrs. Thurston. Why, you couldn't find a crowd of them gathered anywhere on the streets to-day that you didn't hear them talking about the Professor's wife. They're mighty satisfied with their new teacher."

"It will be a short-lived satisfaction. Miss Long is coming back next week, and I shall not be allowed to teach any longer."

"No," said Brinton, absently, "I don't reckon you will.—By the way, Mrs. Thurston, I saw Val Sterling down in Prestonpans this morning, and he particularly

asked me to give you his regards." Brinton smiled as he gave this message, as if there was something remaining unsaid that gave him either great pleasure or great amusement.

"Did you see Zoë Mason?"

"Yes," drawled Brinton, "I saw Miss Zoë this morning early,—but when I came away *Miss* Zoë wasn't there."

The curious form of this declaration arrested Helen's attention. She looked at Brinton inquiringly, and the same air of amusement and delight overspread his face again; but he did not explain himself.

"She is back here," said Helen, rising and opening the shutters; "I suppose she drove over early,—I saw her when I went down there to see Mrs. Mason, this afternoon."

"Are you sure you saw Miss Zoë Mason?" said Brinton, in a low voice.

"I spoke with someone that looked very much like her," said Helen, laughing. Brinton was behaving oddly this evening; but her attention was diverted for the moment by the unusual number of people who seemed to be passing. "It seems to me that all Tallawara is coming up our way," she said.

Brinton's laughing manner dropped away from him completely; he went to the window and looked out. "I reckon a good many people are taking a walk," he said, indifferently; "the evening is pretty warm." But his tone was uneasy and his glance was alert.

They had not lighted the lights, but were sitting, Brinton and Thurston smoking, in the twilight, when the gate clicked and there was a tramp of heavy feet

upon the gravel of the path. Brinton sprang up, the newcomers were Trenholm, the rector, and the President, who came forward and took Thurston's hand in both of his: Thurston's face grew very still and set.

Helen, regarding their coming in the light of an apology for the evening before, welcomed them cordially. They looked at her gravely; apparently her little courtesies were lost upon them. Trenholm called Thurston off, and the two went out and sat on the porch; they were soon followed by Brinton and the President, and Helen was left alone with the rector.

She had seated herself near the window, where she could look out. From the foot of the hill below their place the noise of a steady stream of passers could be heard on the loose boards of the little bridge that crossed the Branch. The hedge hid the sidewalk from Helen's view, but between the tall mock-oranges on either side of the gate she could see men, passing almost in close file, like a procession; the rector seemed intensely nervous, and Helen, although she could not tell why, began to be frightened. She noted that Brinton and Trenholm moved down toward the gate, and occasionally spoke with the people who were going by; their talk was even energetic, at times, but always in low tones.

"What do you think is going on?" she said to Dr. Rider.

"Oh, some political meeting. These elections are always a source of unhealthy excitement."

"But the election doesn't take place until Monday."

"The election itself is the least part of the excitement, ma'am.—I wish you would let me shut that

window. I've had a very sore throat lately, and if I sit in this draught I won't be able to preach on Sunday."

Helen rose to allow the old gentleman to do as he requested; but she had scarcely moved when there was a flash of light in the sky to her left and a sudden wild shout.

Regardless of his cold Dr. Rider rushed hatless into the hall and out on to the porch. "Sit where you are," he called to Helen through the window; "it is no place for women."

"What are they doing?"

"I reckon they are burning the school-house. You won't teach there again, Mrs. Thurston!"

There was a ring of triumph in his voice that angered Helen, who, without thinking of the consequences, stepped across the low window-sill on the porch and ran after him.

"If you don't want to make more trouble than there is already, you'll keep back!"

Helen made no answer,—she was too indignant for words.

"I only hope they'll stop at the school-house," panted the Doctor, as he stood at the gate looking up the road. "I only hope they'll stop there and keep away from the Longs. Dear me, Mrs. Thurston, I don't know what to do; I wish you would go into the house. If I get to the school-house in time my presence may stop further violence; but I can't leave you standing out here alone."

"You needn't wait," said Helen, quietly; "I am able to protect myself. No one is going to touch me."

"When the people once begin a thing like this, they don't know how to stop themselves."

"Then they must be stopped," said Helen.

"I'm not so sure of that; a little lesson will do no harm. No possession that we have is safe from the hands of these thieving negroes! They steal the forks and spoons from our tables under our noses. No woman in the town is safe on the street; you're not even safe here to-night at your own gate; and since you have been here you have been the anxiety of the whole place by the way you have gone off alone on these long walks. We can't stand it any longer! —There, what's that? Somebody has fired a shotgun!" And the old man, unable any longer to control his impatience, ran off up the road.

Helen hesitated; she was not afraid, but she shrank from a mob, particularly a mob intent on arson and perhaps murder. Curiosity and anxiety at last overcame her repugnance, and she walked slowly up the road, holding her dark thin dress carefully away from the dust. As she approached the crowd, however, she saw a man run hastily toward her. It was Thurston. "You must go back to the house and lock the doors," he said.

"This is no time to think of ourselves!" she answered, almost contemptuously. "This thing must be stopped. Has no one remonstrated with the people?"

Thurston turned and looked toward them, sighed a little helplessly and said, "What would be the use? Coming from me, it would probably be of no effect; coming from you, it would add fuel to the flames."

"Do you mean to say that you are going to allow them to burn that school-house without making one effort to save it?"

"It can't be saved," said Thurston. "Old Louis just tried and bullets rained about him and dug up the ground at his feet. Of course they didn't mean to hurt him; but if there was determined attempt made they wouldn't hesitate to shoot to kill."

"It would be better to be killed, then!" said Helen, passionately.

"I think not," and he sighed again. "They are not hurting anyone, they are only solacing their feelings by burning the school-house, as they have done before; once they took up a collection in church the next day to rebuild it. The only thing I'm afraid of is—" he stopped.

"What?"

"I am afraid they may make some demonstration to frighten those poor ladies over at the Mission. Do you go home now; show no lights in the windows, and lock the doors. I shall watch in the crowd and try to hear their plans, and at the first movement in the direction of the Longs' I will go over there and warn them.—I might go the length of fighting for them; I may even be killed!" he added, with a sort of unemotional bitterness.

Helen turned away, and Thurston, thinking that she had taken his advice, walked back and stood among the crowd.

Over at the Mission Miss Simmons sat sewing in the lamp-lit parlor, while Miss Edwards, with all her

writing materials spread about her, was composing a letter to a great Northern paper—one of her long communications full of hopeful generalities and suave platitudes, containing numerous happy allusions to the "trend of circumstances," and the necessity of "being in touch with the times." Miss Edwards always wrote the letters because, when they returned eventually to Tallawara, they never gave offence.

Miriam, who had found the heat of the lamp uncomfortable, had gone outside and was sitting in a low wicker chair upon the porch. The scent of jonquils and narcissus made the air heavy and fragrant; a peach-tree was blooming, too early, near the corner of the veranda; every once in a while a pink petal would sift down and show a moment in the light that streamed through the open window behind her. Frogs in the distant Branch croaked in intermittent chorus, and there were faint sounds and furtive movements in the shrubbery as of small creatures creeping to and fro in the night.

All at once Miriam became aware of a hum and noise like the sound of a gathering crowd. She listened, startled; then rising, she stood at the window and beckoned quietly to Miss Simmons; the little old lady came out on the porch and stood a moment. "They are gathering over at the school-house,—there is mischief afoot," she said.

"How do you know?"

Miss Simmons's head was raised proudly. "I have heard them before. If they burn it, this will be the fourth time!"

"And papa not here!"

" You should be glad he is away; they shot at him the last time; one bullet hit him."

Miriam drew her breath.

" They will not shoot at me," said Miss Simmons; " I am going over there, now, to see what I can do."

" You? "

" Of course, who else? You couldn't go into a crowd of men like that."

" You can't go alone."

" I must. You know Miss Edwards always says the wrong thing." She went into the hall and took a shawl from the hat-rack, cool and intrepid, even to bravado. " Julia," she called, through the open window to Miss Edwards, " we are going out for a little walk."

" Not far? " said Miss Edwards, looking up apprehensively.

" Oh, only a step or two," said Miss Simmons. " You shall not come! " she said in an undertone to Miriam.

" I'm not going to let you go by yourself."

" Don't be annoying," said Miss Simmons, almost petulantly. " Go back, I have neither time nor heart for argument."

" I shall either come with you or follow alone,—you have no right to refuse me as if I were a troublesome child," said Miriam, hurrying after her; but the little shawled figure fled so swiftly that she could hardly keep up with it. " There is someone coming there at the road-side! " Miriam called in a low voice.

Miss Simmons never wavered. " It is Mrs. Thurston," she answered.

"You must go back," said Helen. "They are burning the school-house."

"Yes," said Miss Simmons, tranquilly keeping on; "we know it. I am going to put out the fire." She looked so small, with her white hair and dimpled old face, that Helen involuntarily smiled. "If I can't put out the fire," pursued Miss Simmons, "I shall at least save the books.—I have always saved the books."

"They have already fired at old Louis when he tried to put out the blaze."

"They will hardly fire at me; but if they do, I am sure I can't help it!" said Miss Simmons, impatiently.

The three continued to walk rapidly; the ground began to ascend, and they could hear the hoarse murmur of the crowd distinctly; but suddenly a voice called in the distance behind them and Miss Edwards came running wildly up the hill.

"How could you do this?" she panted. "Did you think I would stop in safety while you went into danger?"

"You must not talk," said Miss Simmons.

"The cowards!" cried Miss Edwards. "The low, dastardly, cowardly brutes!"

Miss Simmons stood still in the road and faced Miss Edwards coldly. "If you insist upon talking, do you know what I shall do?"

Miss Edwards stopped in the midst of her eloquence.

"I shall knock you down!"

Miss Edwards opened her mouth as if to answer. "You are not to speak one word; not to me, nor to Miriam, nor to Mrs. Thurston, nor to anyone. Will you nod if you are willing to promise to be dumb?

—Nod; not speak! And if you don't nod you must go back; you know I am right."

Miss Edwards set her lips close, as if recognizing the wisdom of Miss Simmons's caution, nodded violently, and then, shook her fist vindictively in the air.

"Miriam," said Miss Simmons, "you and Mrs. Thurston go one on each side of her and see that she doesn't do that as we pass through the crowd."

They pushed ahead until they came to the schoolhouse, where a quiet fell on all as the men made a lane for them to the front.

Around the burning building the trampled ground, where the children played, was clear.

"I suppose this is the dead-line," murmured Miss Simmons, and taking the shawl from her snow-white head walked quietly across the open space to the burning house. Helen, with Miriam and Miss Edwards, followed so close behind that in the strong lights and shadows no one saw their faces.

There was a murmur of indignation and surprise; someone called, "Stop them!" Others, "Fire on them!" and others, "Shame!" But no one moved, a whisper went through the throng that it was Miss Simmons and three of the colored women from the Mission.

The fire had been started at the corners of the building, and as it had not burned very freely as yet there was still a possibility of going inside. Miss Simmons, Miriam and Helen entered and began to pass the books out of the window to Miss Edwards, who piled them in the midst of the playground; but the heat became suffocating, and Miss Simmons, deciding

that it would be wiser to remove some of the heavier pieces of furniture before it was too late, called Miss Edwards in; before long all four came staggering out under the weight of a heavy melodion, the article of greatest expense and the thing they could least well afford to lose.

"Good heavens, Thurston!" said Trenholm. "Those are not negro women, one of them is your wife!" But before he had finished Thurston had started toward the building.

"Come back, man, come back!" cried Trenholm, and then he also sprang forward, for he had seen Miriam Long in the doorway. There was an angry roar from the crowd, but Thurston, after his first short run, drew up suddenly, and deliberately crossed through the brightest glare of the light. Not a shot was fired, until Trenholm dashed by and then the sudden crack of a pistol from a buggy on the road came and Thurston fell headlong. Johnson, who was in the buggy, raised his pistol again, but at this moment a haggard, tattered figure seemed to spring up out of the ground, and a gigantic negro, standing over Thurston, levelled a rifle at the buggy; but before either could fire there was another shot from somewhere nearer the road; Johnson, in the buggy, fell forward in a heap and the horse dashed away. With a howl the crowd surged in toward the negro, who threw down his rifle and fled.

Hearing the increased noise outside the women in the school-house redoubled their efforts; blackened and dishevelled, Helen came to the window to free her lungs from smoke when she found herself face to face with Trenholm.

"Your husband has been shot. Come quick."

"Shot? How?"

"He attempted to cross over when he saw you. —Quick!"

"Have I killed him?"

"Hurry, hurry!" repeated Trenholm. "He is still living!"

Helen ran through the doorway, toward the spot where Thurston was lying. "What have I done? What have I done?" she cried, kneeling at his side.

In the red glare he could see her clearly; he was sorry for her, a little, and he wondered whether he were going to die; but in his weakness he could not conquer the curious instinct of coldness and antagonism which of late so often overcame him, when Helen, in the certainty of her Northern theories, blundered over Southern facts.

"You said," he panted, "you said it would be better to be killed."

Helen stared at him, her eyes stony with horror. "Ah!" she cried, her voice hoarsened by the smoke and sharpened by anguish. "Do not say that! Do not say that!"

Thurston closed his eyes. This then was death! He confronted the thought idly for a moment, with no more than the same cool curiosity he had felt before other well-known but hitherto uninvestigated phenomena.—Still, death was the end of all things, and as he was leaving his wife—he had better explain; he tried to rise, but knew that he had not moved.—It could not be that he was leaving Helen to believe that he had gone out of life filled with petty resentment! No,

she would understand; yet there had been times when she had not understood.—What if she had never understood?—There were things to explain; he must speak, he would speak—but he lay as dead. A great and terrible groan broke from him, and he lost consciousness. Someone stooped over him, feeling his pulse and heart; men came with a litter and raised him gently, and his wife silently followed the little procession homeward, from time to time mechanically tearing away the hindering shreds of the thin fine gown that hung about her in rags.

All that night Helen sat by Thurston's bed, holding the intolerable review of the past which we find thrust upon us when things seem irrevocable. Time rolled slowly backward, and the last year revealed itself as one long series of mistakes; but although, with the imperative necessity for self-vindication through which the soul ever attempts to find an excuse, she pleaded to herself passionately that she had been justified; she saw with inexorable clearness that one might be justified, and yet wrong.

Had she not had provocation? Yes—what then?

Is not the bitterness of the retaliation palliated by the suffering that has been inflicted? Not when we come before this tribunal!

And yet in that moment of supreme recognition, when, branded by the white-hot agony of remorse, Self paid the cost of its own indulgence, it still shrieked shrilly in protest; for Self outlives renunciation.

Thurston lay before her, helpless, perhaps dying. Helen looked at what lay behind with despairing eyes

and saw the future through a hopeless mist. Without Thurston life looked strangely blank. How infinitesimal now seemed the sacrifices which she had refused to make for him, how intangible the concessions she had so fiercely withheld! And how she had trusted him, even when she had blamed,—such bitter blame for such trivial offences!—But great occasions come about at long, long intervals, and trivialities grind on relentless every day,—while life grows gray, so ghastly gray!

Which was to blame that they had drifted apart, she or Thurston? But why seek the offender? Blame lies at his door who, being able to right a wrong, does it not, and she knew that, being strong, she could have made all different, had she so willed.

Still, Self cried out against that difference. Concessions! Sacrifice! What was man that he should demand consideration and exact compliance? Was not a woman's individuality also sacred? Wherefore this eternal adjustment?

Abnegation meant more than taking up a burden, it meant being crushed beneath it!

Then, ah! where would be the joy of living, the idle brightnesses of every day, the dear irresponsibilities of youth, the tender mockeries of love, the witty freedom of caprice? Little things, graciously conceded to the weak!—Helen, foreboding the barren loneliness that the lack of these implied, mourned that she must be strong; yet she saw her path clear before her, and seeing, chose straightway to walk in it.

But Self lived on, crying rebelliously in the angry pangs of that new birth, through which it had already entered into the true individuality of Sacrifice.

XXXVIII

THE TOOL OF FATE

WHEN the crowd at the school-house had swept away in pursuit of Hannibal, he had stopped of his own accord and faced them. "What you all chasin' me fo'?" he demanded, "I ain't done nothin'."

"You shot Gus Johnson; he fell out of the buggy, dead, a little way down the road."

"I neveh let off my gun."

He had flung away his old rifle; someone who had picked it up fired it in the air,—both barrels were loaded.

"Dah now," said Hannibal, triumphantly.

"Somebody killed Gus Johnson," argued his captors. "What did you level your gun at him for?"

"'Cause he fired at Mars' Jim Trenholm, an' when he seed he only hit Misteh Thurston he gwine shoot again to make suah."

"Oh, let him go!" said Danny Wilson, who had been one of Thurston's students; "I've had enough of this!"

In fact, horror and regret seemed to have put an end to all animosities; whites and blacks alike had gathered to help extinguish the fire at the burning school-house, which, though hopelessly charred and defaced, still stood; and when Miss Edwards went home she tranquilly finished her letter to the news-

paper, mentioning in eloquent terms the heroic services which the people of the town had rendered, and speaking regretfully of the accident which might cost Professor Thurston his life.

Hannibal had followed the crowd which now gathered around the Thurstons' house in hopes of hearing some news; he had not been there long when Ailsa came out in search of a messenger. "Heah you," she said, "take dis down to de drug-sto'." Hannibal came forward. "Mis' Helen don' want me fo' a little while," she whispered, as he took the paper from her hand; "you all betteh go 'long home soon's eveh you can. I'll be 'round befo' long."

Hannibal took the prescription, and after he had returned with the medicine, went to the cabin. Ailsa had been before him and was preparing supper.

"I had one supper," said Hannibal, sullenly, "an' I don' feel like eatin' no mo'."

"Well, I does," said Ailsa, "I ain't dragged dat ten mile up heah since seben fo' nothin'."

Hannibal looked at her as she sat and ate with evident relish; she had taken time to wash and dress. She looked clean and fresh; a bright color burned in either cheek, and her eyes were sparkling.

"Woman," cried Hannibal, suddenly, "you make me sick! You go an' shoot a man, shoot him from behine, an' den dress up an' eat your suppeh. You make me *sick!*"

"Who say I shot him?" demanded Ailsa, defiantly. "He had his own pistol in his han'."

"I say it! You shot him from back da' in de bushes, an' you needn't say you didn't, fo' I was a lookin' at

you. An' what if he had his pistol in his han'? What had his pistol to do wiv you shootin'? Aha! You got his odder one at de Guthrie mansion.—Wha dat pistol now?"

"Neveh you min'."

"I couldn't shoot a man from behin'. What 'd you do it fo'?"

Ailsa refused to answer.

"Who you gwine murder nex'?" queried Hannibal, calmly, after a long pause.

"You! If you don't look out!" said Ailsa, furiously. "What business you got sayin' I murdered anybody?"

"'Cause you stuck dat knife in de ole Gen'ral," pursued Hannibal, "when he try dat time to take you away from Gus Johnson.—Now you go an' shoot Johnson his own se'f.—Woman, you is mighty hard to understan'!"

"Who say I kill de Gen'ral?" said Ailsa.

"I says so, fo' I saw you do it!"

Ailsa's eyes glittered. "Seems to me you is always 'round whar y'ain't wanted," she cried, furiously. "You all betteh watch out. Folks can be 'round like dat once too often."

XXXIX

THE SPIRIT OF THE LAND

A MONTH of anxiety, watching, and suffering, a month of absorbing care: days when the hot sun made the sick-room breathless, days when the tearing winds made the sick man rave: long nights of tossing fever, when the spring rains furiously lashed the rattling windows and the water from the eaves-troughs, pouring in torrents through the great tin pipes at the corners of the house, chuckled and snarled and worried, while Death's quarry gasped helplessly within; then, the furious fight was over and the obstinate struggle had ended,—for Helen—in victory.

Mrs. Mason and Miss Locke had watched with her, ungrudging, tireless, forgetful of themselves. In Thurston's study the old rector sat idly turning the leaves of a book that he did not read, ready with help night and day. The doctor scarcely left her, and the President came and went, careless of the added labor entailed upon him by the many hours that he waited, in mere hope of being useful. Brinton was almost part of the household.

Zoë came only at long intervals, strangely silent, worn, and tired; they told Helen that she had been helping care for Miriam Long, who was ill. Helen

wondered, and for a time was anxious, until, in answer to her repeated asking, they gave her better news.

Trenholm never came.

The special election was over and Yarnell's tactics were successful long before Thurston, after having descended the slope of Death, had succeeded in dragging himself slowly back to life again.

It had been a hard, hard fight, but to some strong souls the battle is like wine, and Helen as yet had not felt the reaction of fatigue. More than this, everything was hurry and confusion, in the effort to get away before the overwhelming heat of summer should overtake them, and the change in the location of the college made it necessary that she should leave her household affairs in such shape as would make removal easy.

She waked early on the last morning of their stay in the Billings house, and rising softly stood looking out with the sensation of being the only person alive that sometimes comes when, after long nights of watching, we open a window on the world for a breath of clean air. There had been a change in the night and a rime of dew like hoar-frost outlined the tangled grass of the garden; the sun was not yet above the tops of the trees on the horizon, and there was a clearness and freshness in all the atmosphere,—almost the touch of east she had once spoken of so longingly to Trenholm. A few narrow rose-colored clouds stretched upward in the blue of the morning, the air smelled sweet and keen, and the earth seemed new-made, beautiful, with a strange austerity, and lonely grace.

Above the village the high water-tank hovered in the morning air, and the dome of the court-house and the spires of the churches cut the pale clearness of the sky—she should never look out upon it, thus, again! Something, not regret, and yet strangely akin to it, stirred in her heart. She had not known sunshine there, but there are times when we learn things in shadow that are better than sunshine.

The house was to be finally dismantled that day, and the carriage came early to take Thurston to Mrs. Bruce's, out of the noise and confusion. Helen was unable to go with him, but as she leaned over to tuck in the last wrap about his knees, he bent forward and looked through the windows once more at the place and the grounds about it. "We shall never come back," he said.

"Perhaps not."

"Are you glad?" His eyes devoured her face; he knew that she had not been happy there, and yet he would not have her say so.

"It is our first home," she answered; "it will always be that to us."

Thurston sank back on the pillows with a sigh of content, and the carriage drove away.

Helen walked slowly back into the bare rooms. It was the beginning of the new life.

"I must go over and say good-by to Miriam Long," she said to Zoë as the two were stooping over one of the last packing-boxes somewhat later in the day. "It has been terrible that I shouldn't have done it before; but the doctor said she couldn't see me, and

so long as she was better—" She had gone on excusing herself regretfully, when a sharp little breath from Zoë made her raise her head. "Miriam hasn't been asking for me? She hasn't wondered at my not coming?" she cried.

Zoë rose and walked hurriedly down the room. It was Thurston's study, and on top of one of his empty bookcases stood the little figurine she had noticed on Christmas Day. "You've forgotten to pack this," she said, coming back with it in her hand.

"No; I was going to take it to Miriam. I left it out on purpose; it looks like her."

"Oh, give it to me! Please give it to me!"

Helen was still kneeling by the box looking up at Zoë. "You must tell me," she said, firmly. "Have I offended Miriam? It doesn't seem possible that she should be hurt with me when she knows——"

Zoë's soft eyes filled with tears and welled over. "Oh, hush, hush!" she said. "I have been dreading this minute for days! How can I tell you?" She sat down on one of the boxes and hid her face in her hands.

Helen's heart began to beat with slow, heavy, painful throbs. "What do you mean? Why do you cry?" she whispered.

"Have you never suspected?"

"What should I suspect? Is she very ill?"

Zoë did not answer.

"Do they say she can't recover?"

Still Zoë sobbed on.

"It is not worse than that? She has not—died?" The word choked her.

Zoë looked up. "We didn't dare tell you; you all had so much to trouble you."

"But—when?"

"Ten days ago. It has all been so dreadful—so dreadful! And Jim's just broken-hearted."

"Trenholm?—Wait!" Helen rose and went to the window; she came back in a moment and poured herself a glass of water.

"You look like a ghost!" said Zoë.

"It has been a shock."

"The fever came on her just about the time you taught for her; at first no one thought it was serious, —Oh, I'm so glad, so glad that I went home with her that day!—And that it all came right with Jim, and that she knew he loved her all along."

"Yes, he loved her all along," repeated Helen.

"It's plain enough, when you know it. That's why he stayed on here all winter."

"Has he gone?"

"Yes. After they were married——"

"They were married!"

"Jim wanted it, and the doctor thought if she began to get better he might take her away; but it wasn't any use."

And all this had happened, and all this was over! Helen neither wept nor spoke.

Zoë wiped the tears from her eyes. "She was very happy, more because she hadn't misunderstood Jim: she used, in her delirium, to beg and beg him to forgive her for not trusting him. Poor old Jim! He took it mighty hard."

"And you were there through it all?"

"They couldn't keep me away. At first mamma and papa wouldn't hear of it; but Mr. Brinton——" Zoë hesitated, but Helen did not notice.

The work was nearly done. Zoë and Helen were sitting, sorrowful and silent, when Mrs. Mason came into the room.

"I left the Professor down there at Anne Bruce's sleeping like a baby," she said, cheerfully, "and I thought I'd just slip up here and see how you two were getting on with your packing."

"Zoë has been telling me," said Helen, in a dull, lifeless voice.

Mrs. Mason seated herself on the only chair in the room. "Well," she said, with a comfortable little laugh, "and what do you all think of that? You will have a fine specimen of the manners and customs of Southern girls to tell your friends in the North!"

"Oh, mamma, hush!" cried Zoë. "I've been telling her about Miss Long."

Mrs. Mason's face clouded momentarily. "Wasn't that just perfectly dreadful!" she said. "And it was so queer, too, about Jim; nobody suspected a single thing until he came down for Dr. Rider one Sunday as we were coming out of church. It was mighty queer,—sad, too."

"Mamma! I wish you wouldn't talk about it! It sounds as if you didn't care!"

"Of course I care! To be sure it isn't as if I'd lost one of my own family. Zoë Ma—" Mrs. Mason stopped and laughed a little again. "Zoë didn't tell you anything else, then?" she said to Helen.

"What is there to tell?"

"Who else do you reckon has been getting married, too?"

"Oh, don't!" said Zoë.

But her mother went on, absorbed in the interest of the living. "I reckon you haven't forgotten the day they burned the school-house, Mrs. Thurston? Well, if Zoë Mason and Mr. Brinton didn't just go and get married down in Prestonpans that morning, with Maisie for bridesmaid and Val for best man!"

Zoë's charming face half dimpled into a smile.

"Is it true?" said Helen, coming toward her.

"I tried not to love him; but I just couldn't help it!" said Zoë, despondently.

"It is a great surprise, but you will be happy!" said Helen, wistfully.

"I thought it would do this town good to give them a little surprise; but since all this has happened, it seems as if I hadn't any business to have the fun of it."

"But how could you keep it so quiet?"

"It's easy enough to keep things quiet when you don't know them your own self."

"Well, I reckon I don't mind very much now it's all over," sighed Mrs. Mason. "Zoë was bound to get married some time or other, and she's not any too young as it is. It all came of her buying that white Liberty satin dress. I knew there wouldn't any luck come of it when she would persist in doing it."

"I'd like to know what Henry Brinton is?" Zoë demanded, indignantly.

"Oh, I don't call him luck—he's nothing but just the ordinary course of events."

"So's papa, then!"

"No such thing!" Mrs. Mason's voice ran up in an angry little shriek. "William James Mason and I were all ready to run away from home three weeks before we were married, and if my father hadn't given his consent, we would have done it, too!"

"And as for that white satin dress being to blame, I'd never have thought of marrying Henry Brinton if you hadn't put those diamond buckles in when you sent it to me."

"Zoë Mason! You know mighty well it was your papa put those in——"

"Ain't you and he one?"

"And he never would have done it if that white satin dress hadn't looked so bridey that he just couldn't help it.—When it comes to a joke William James Mason has no strength of character!—And if it wasn't that white satin dress, what was it put Mr. Brinton up to getting that wedding-veil?"

"Oh, I reckon he hasn't any strength of character when it comes to a joke, either."

Helen listened bewildered as the mother and daughter recounted the tale of that eventful game of bluff.

"And I just told them," concluded Mrs. Mason, "that those who marry in haste are mighty sure to repent at leisure."

"And I told mamma," said Zoë, rising, "that those who marry at leisure are just about as sure to repent in haste; so there you are!"

The interest and excitement of her new venture sent Zoë off cheered and laughing in spite of herself. Helen went on, heavily, with her work.

They were to go away that afternoon. Very little

had been left to do, and when the last box was corded and the key turned in the door, Helen stood outside, and, like Thurston, paused for a last look about her.

Above her, across the architrave of the temple-like porch, the drooping wistaria hung in a fringe of pale purple clusters. The roses were already beginning to bloom as they twined on the lofty pillars that ran high up to the roof of the house. Out in the garden the tall japonica-trees, both red ones and white ones, glanced in the sunshine, with blossoms, some like points of flame, and others like white doves, nestling in the deep dark green. Crocus and narcissus peeped up at every corner, the grass was purple with violets, and far and near the aromatic blossoms of the peach-trees sent forth sweetness, as they stood in their mist of pink. Tufts of brilliant verdure were coming up everywhere, and the mock-orange at the gateway was frosted over in pale-green spikes; all the shining foliage was aglitter in the sun that slanted down through the great glossy leaves of the magnolias in white streaks of high light; overhead stretched a sky, adorably blue, "superb above"—so someone had said—"as no other sky on earth."

And in the distance, marvellously soft, through the beautiful poisonous haze of spring-time, were the trees of the cemetery, where, under their misty, cloudy foliage, Miriam waited for Trenholm, with the generations of his people.

As the soft relaxing air blew in upon her, something in Helen's moral nature cried out in protest at its languor; and yet, in spite of its strange and alien atmosphere, this wonderful country had made fast its

hold upon her with a tenacity that would not be weakened. Those first days in Tallawara, full of action, unhappiness, and interest, would always live in the background of her thoughts. The Spirit of the Land had wrought its spell; forever its haunting memory would hover in her heart, a shadowy presence, fatal yet enchanting.

THE END.